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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

The photo above shows the sun in Anchorage on November 22, at 3:30 pm overlooking a bog near our house. The days seem to be flying by, and it is hard to believe that the winter solstice is only 3 weeks from now! Afterwards, it may be mostly psychological, but I always feel encouraged seeing the days getting longer again.

The thought of the next spring, however, is never far off. As early as August, I am thinking about what I might want to graft the following April and May. How about you? Have you submitted your [request for rootstock](#)? All of the K.5 cherry and St. Julian Plum are spoken for, but there is still apple, pear, P. americana plum and Manchurian apricot available.

Likewise, I have also put in my request for mail order scion wood. There are always some cultivars that I want to try that are not common or available at our scion exchange. If you want to mail order scion wood for topworking or for the rootstock you ordered, you should get your request in now, especially if you are wanting to graft less common fruits like plums, apricots, or pears. If where you order your scion wood offers “clean” or virus free scion wood, it is worth the extra money.

Popular places for ordering scion wood that have some selections appropriate for Alaska include:

[Purvis Nursery and Orchard](#) owned by APFGA co-founder Bob Purvis. Click the link to see the [2026 cultivar availability](#). Bob can answer questions about what can grow in Alaska.

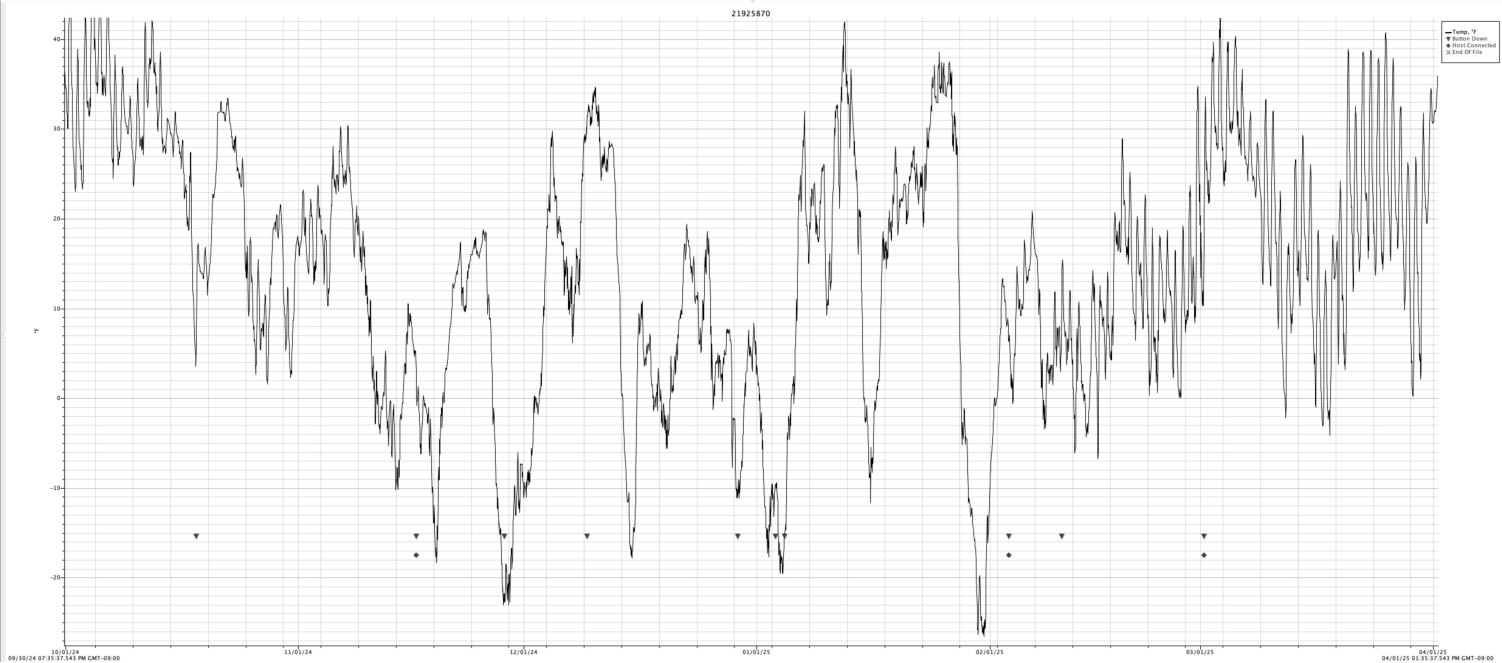
[Fedco Trees](#) Maine collection of modern and heirloom cultivars curated by John Bunker. Select zone appropriate cultivars with ripening times no later than late summer.

[Cummins Nursery](#) in New York. Select zone appropriate scions with NY ripening dates of August 25 or earlier. Good source of clean scionwood.

With the holidays near, maybe you are looking for a gift for your fruit growing partner or friend. A [brix refractometer](#) is only about \$20. Or maybe a decent [grafting knife](#)? Someone who does apple thinning by hand would really appreciate a good pair of [thinning shears](#). One of my favorite tools is a [handicap grabber](#). They are a great for picking apples up to 8 ft high or picking up fallen apples without bending over or crawling under the tree. If your special someone is really deserving, how about a [temperature logger package](#) for around \$300 so they can compute their own growing degree days?

Speaking of Growing Degree Days, Steve and Sarah Masterman shared with me their temperature logger data from this past season. They are located near Fairbanks in Ester, Alaska. Their season effectively ended on September 25, (daytime temperatures no longer getting above 42° F.) with a season total of 2634 GDD/42°. As a reference, our seasonal total in East Anchorage was 2603 GDD/42° with an end date of October 19.

I find it fascinating to look at temperature logger data as it provides a historical record regarding what happened weather-wise. For the Fairbanks region the months of November, December, and January last winter were punctuated by constant large oscillations of temperature with changes of 40° or more over just a few days. In the Masterman’s data, the largest swing occurred at the end of January when temperatures went from 38° to -27° in just 3 days, a 65° plummet!



The chart above shows temperature data from October 1, 2024, (left margin) through April 1, 2025 (right margin). Although it is too small to read, the text under the bottom x-axis marks out the months in between with corresponding vertical lines. Each number on the left hand y-axis and its corresponding major horizontal line represents 10° increments in temperature starting at the top with 40° F. and going to the bottom to nearly -30°. The narrow sawtooth temperature lines on the right-hand third of the chart beginning around the middle of February show the returning influence of the sun with progressively increasing daily solar gain and loss. This looks graphically very different from the previous 2 months where the sun has a diminished impact on daily solar gain at high latitudes in Alaska.

It just so happens that we are pleased to announce that our first speaker of the Winter Speakers Series will be Steve Masterman. To join the presentation just click the following [Zoom link](#) on Thursday, December 11, 2025, at 7:00 pm. The Mastermans have been developing and expanding their orchard. He will share the success they had with fruit this past season, recent developments in their orchard, and the lessons learned so far. If needed, here is the full [zoom invitation](#).

There will also be a Board of Directors meeting the following week on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Members are always welcome to attend. Click the [link to join](#) at the appointed day/time. Here are the links for the past [minutes](#), proposed [agenda](#), and full [Zoom invitation](#) if desired.

Regarding the Board of Directors, long time Director, Val Glooschenko, has elected to retire from the board. We want to acknowledge and thank Val for her many years of service to APFGA. In her place, we welcome Ken Hoffman who has volunteered to fill the remainder of Val’s term. Ken is the Executive Director for the Mat-Su Chapter of the Alaska Farm Bureau. He is located in Palmer where he is the owner of Mat-Su Microgreens and is a commercial grower of currants and other small berries which are sold at farmers markets. We wish Val all the best and look forward to working with Ken.

On November 21, I finally got around to creating and sending out a survey form to those who participated in the 2024 Geneva Rootstock Trial. I realize that not everyone keeps records about what lives or dies and that snow has made it difficult to visually assess what you have. If that describes you, just save the email and put a reminder on your calendar to fill out the survey in May. I always find it helpful to put the date of the email in my calendar so I can find it easily. Last winter was unusually bad for young trees with no snow and huge temperature swings. But nevertheless, the survey will help us understand what rootstocks have survived in pots or in the ground.

Finally, a reminder about winter care for your fruit trees and bushes. The essentials at this point include watching for snow loading and stopping voles. Some trees still have leaves on them and consequently have the potential to get laden with snow, especially if it is a wet snow. Small bushes, such as haskaps, currants, gooseberries, and blueberries, as well as young tree branches can get pushed down with snow. Immediately after a snow, shake the snow off and gently coax the branches back up if buried. Fresh snow quickly consolidates into a firm mass that by spring can have built up enough weight to break branches as spring melting causes the harden snowpack to collapses downward.

The other major winter danger to our trees is feeding by voles. Even if you have physically screening around your trees, I recommend that you repeatedly pack down the snow around the base of your trees after each substantial snow. You can do this with an implement like a hoe or use your boot or snowshoe. Voles travel during the winter in the interface between the snow and the ground. Packing down the snow means they can’t tunnel to the base of your tree. It also hopefully results in keeping the surrounding snow level below the top of your rodent screens to keep the voles out. If voles girdle your tree, it generally means replacing the tree.

Hope to see you on Zoom for Steve Masterman’s presentation on December 11!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

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