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Hello Fruit Growers!

My wife Miok and I vacationed on the Big Island for the first half of January. It was a chance to wake up with the sun and to eat fresh locally grown fruit and produce. We went to four farmer’s markets each week. One grower happened to have two fruits that I was not acquainted with. The photo above is of two “water apples” ([Syzgium samarangense](#)) which were a delightful crunchy fruit that tasted like a somewhat watery apple/pear cross, but of course bears no relation. The other fruit new to us was called an “ice cream bean” ([Inga edulis](#)). The pods contained segments, each with a bean surrounded by a sweet, cottony, white [arillus](#).

While we were gone, we watched with concern the weather in Anchorage and read about the school closures due to warm temperatures, rain and ice and the huge windstorm that left some folks without power for days. Upon returning, the unusual warmth continued making this January one of the warmest on record in Anchorage.

Before returning recently to more normal winter temperatures, the second half of January saw warm temperatures in the 40s along with rain and three days of flood watch. Our fruit trees in Anchorage are working to regain their lost enhanced hardiness due to the above freezing temperatures. Because of the loss of enhanced hardiness they can be damaged by a sudden drop to severe cold. Fairbanks went from rain to -30° F in a matter of days. Our orchard in East Anchorage went from 48° F to -8° F within 4 days. In addition, the warm weather has chipped away at the plant’s chill hour requirements. Once that has been met, the trees can come out of dormancy should there be a warming spell before winter is finished and then be damaged by additional cold weather.

NOAA data indicates that 2024 was the warmest year on record, beating 2023, the previous record holder. The planet’s 10 warmest years since 1850 have all occurred in the past decade. The 2024 upper ocean heat content, which is the amount of heat stored in the upper 2,000 meters of the ocean, was the highest on record. Click the link to read the [full report](#). For specific events in Alaska, click the link for the NOAA Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy [Weather and Climate Highlights and Impacts](#), September 2024 to November 2024 Climate Outlook, January 2025 to March 2025.

We should all be shocked by what is occurring to the climate. Time is not in our favor regarding global warming. Even taking drastic action now would not immediately stop what is already in progress, but delaying action to reduce climate warming gasses (especially [methane](#) which is 28x worse than CO2) is a sure recipe for disaster. Although it is the political rigueur today to ignore the findings of scientists and to delude ourselves that no change in behavior is required, we do so at our own peril and expense.

It doesn’t take a genius to know something is amiss when New Orleans gets more snow and is colder than Anchorage in the month of January. Yes, this too is influenced by global warming. Global warming and increasing ocean temperatures cause the jet stream to behave more erratically. A warming Arctic produces a weaker jet stream that is more likely to bend off course and allow cold air to flow into the deep South while at the same time sending warm air to Alaska. For more see the [MIT Climate Portal](#).

I am clear-eyed about what the science indicates and by what has been repeatedly demonstrated by multiple and ongoing extreme climate events (note last 3 seasons). To our younger members, my suggestion is to consider investing in the infrastructure to grow under cover either in a greenhouse or high tunnel ([Controlled Environment \(CE\) Agriculture](#)). It’s a bit late for me to start over as a CE grower, but I fully recognize that growing outside will only become less predictable heading into the future.



On Thursday, February 13, 2025, APFGA member Ray Saft will be the third presenter of our Winter Speaker Series. Ray volunteered to talk to the club about poultry and orchards. We happen to have two pet chickens who roam our gardens and orchard so I was intrigued by Ray’s offer to talk on the subject. We have found chickens to be very enjoyable, if not entertaining additions to our lives. We love the eggs and their poop sure makes the raspberries grow! On the day of the presentation at 7:00 pm, click the link to [hear Ray’s talk](#). Just make sure your Zoom app is up to date before joining the meeting. Here is the [full zoom invitation](#) if needed.

We are just finishing up our Simonet apples harvested last fall. They are still crunchy, although the seed cavity is starting to brown. They hold their shape when cooked and taste great in our morning oatmeal. In a 1999 APFGA news article, Bernie Nickolai wrote that Simonet 1847 was one of his favorite apples and is a “seedling from Edmonton with unknown parentage, but rumored to possibly be Haralson x Rescue Crab.” In our orchard in Anchorage, it ripens at the very end of the season and is extremely hardy (Zone 2). Like most of our apples, due to the weather, the average [brix](#) this year was low (10°), but the size of the fruit was good because we limited the fruit set early on.

Normally, we would be eating our cherries in our oatmeal, but with the small cherry harvest last fall, the apples have made a good stand-in. We miss drinking the cherry juice that we would drain off the thawed cherries. But last Sunday at the DeBarr Costco we found half-gallon jugs of Knudsen’s “Cha Cha Red Tart Cherry Juice” which is 100% U.S. Montmorency cherry juice. The juice is not from concentrate and has a fresh taste. We split it into quarts and freeze one while we drink the other.

On the organizational front, I am pleased to announce that we have two new members who have joined the Board of Directors to fill the remainder of the terms for former Directors Chris Hellmann and Sabrina Shaw. At our January Board meeting the board confirmed the appointment of Directors Dawn Cowan (Wasilla) and Keoki Kim (Palmer). We thank Chris and Sabrina for their service to the club and welcome Dawn and Keoki to the Board.

Also, at the January Board of Directors meeting, the board approved a set of changes to the bylaws to be put to the membership for approval. A vote to approve the changes to the bylaws will be held prior to the March 13, 2025, speaker presentation featuring John McCormack who will be talking about what was learned from last summer’s pollinator research. You can click the following links to view the [proposed changes](#) highlighted in yellow, and [the rational](#) for the changes.

The next Board of Directors meeting will be held on Zoom on Wednesday, February 26. Click the link at 7:00 pm [to join the meeting](#). Click the following links for the [agenda](#), the past [minutes](#), and the full [Zoom invitation](#) if needed.

Our spring schedule of events is falling into line. Here is what we have coming up in March and April:

March 8, 2025	Boyer’s Pruning Workshop
April 5, 2025	Midvalley Pruning Workshop
April 12, 2025	Grafting Workshop

You will notice the Grafting Workshop on Saturday, April 12. We always have a robust free [scion wood](#) exchange with lots of apple scion wood. But if you are looking for something unusual, or for fruits other than apple then you might consider mail ordering scion wood to make sure you have what you need in case a local grower can’t help you.

If you want to mail-order scion wood and haven’t done so yet, time is running out. There are numerous options for ordering scion wood. Those that I have used have included Fedco, Cummins Nursery, and Purvis Nursery and Orchard.

Bob Purvis is a founding member of APFGA and understands Alaska growing conditions. The website for [Purvis Nursery and Orchard](#) contains good information on the varieties and cultivars offered, and Bob is patiently willing to answer any questions.

Fedco Trees, located in Maine, offers cold hardy plant material. The [apple scion collection](#) benefits from the input of Fedco Trees founder and pomologist John Bunker. Cultivars that might be successful in our East Anchorage orchard are listed in the Fedco catalogue as Early, Mid or possibly Late Summer.

And finally, [Cummins Nursery](#) is in New York and is run by Steve Cummins, son of Dr. Jim Cummins who was the force behind the development of the Geneva series of apple rootstocks. When looking at their list of scion wood, we have found that a New York ripening date before September 1, was generally compatible with our East Anchorage Growing Degree Day amounts in a good summer. Of course, you should adjust these recommendations based upon your own micro-climate.

Board Treasurer Gary Masog placed our rootstock orders for the grafting workshop back in the fall. But, if you want to reserve some rootstock, you can still do that. We have Geneva 890 and Baccata Apple, Krymsk 5 Cherry, Harbin Pear, Krymsk 1 and Prunus americana Plum and Siberian Apricot on order. Some, like apple and cherry, we have quite a few still available, but the others will run out soon. Click the link to submit a [rootstock request](#).

Hope to see you on Zoom for Ray Saft’s presentation on poultry in the orchard on Thursday, February 13!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

