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## Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

If the box stores are a sign, then spring has arrived. When doing our weekend shopping at Costco, I noticed they had inexpensive Fiskar pruners, loppers, and pole saws. In preparation for the Grafting Workshop on Saturday, April 12, I purchased a bag of potting soil and a bag of “Raised Bed & In-Ground Soil.” If needed, mixing them half & half makes a pretty good potting mix for rootstock. If my dirt pile is thawed, I may add some soil to the mix along with some perlite for drainage.

My next task was to take stock of empty pots to see if I needed more. Unlike last year, taking inventory is possible since everything is not buried under 3 feet of snow! In South Central Alaska, we received a bit of snow in mid-March, but it is completely gone from the south facing slope of our orchard, and is retreating in the flat part of the yard as daily high temperatures are consistently in the low 40's.

The harvest of scion wood began at the beginning of March. I collected cherry first, since that would be the first to begin swelling if temperatures stayed warm. Reports of early bud swell were received from areas of Anchorage nearer to the water which are warmer in winter. East Anchorage is colder in the winter and the cherry buds were all still dormant earlier in the month. Photo above shows Evans cherry buds as of yesterday.

The remainder of the month was spent collecting apple scion wood and beginning the task of pruning the trees. Many of our trees are now 13-14 years old. Because they are on seedling rootstock, they have been size controlled for both height and width for the past 6 years. Consequently, some branches are getting fairly large and are becoming mainly “blind wood,” meaning they are no longer producing fruit spurs. Because of this, I am contemplating making renewal stub cuts. These would be 4-6” Dutch cuts, a down and outward angled cut that hopefully preserves and stimulates a latent bud on the underside that can grow to become a new, younger and more productive branch. Should the branch be too large/old for a bud to break, then the alternative would be to graft the stub.

Cultivars vary in this behavior depending on whether they lean more towards “tip” bearing versus “spur” bearing. For example, Golden Uralian and Prairie Magic keep active fruit spurs on old wood provided they receive good light exposure, whereas Altiaski Sweet wants to move flower buds to the newer wood. Unfortunately, I now remove much of the newer wood to keep the tree in its space. I can see where the use of smaller clonal rootstock and application of renewal cuts as part of the yearly pruning might be a better way to maintain production with trees that are more tip bearing in nature in a smaller yard where tree spacing is tighter.

April 1 is the arbitrary date when we start tracking Growing Degree Days (GDD) on our temperature logger. The GDDs are units of heat that allow us to predict plant phenology such as bloom, fruit ripening, or even pest emergence. Technically, the accumulation of GDDs should start once the tree has met its chill hour requirement. Last year at the start of April, there were still chill hours left to accumulate before trees could come out of endo-dormancy and begin growing if conditions permitted. However, this year many more chill hours have already accrued because of the unseasonally warm temperatures. So, this season's GDD numbers may be slightly lower than last year's for some events simply because the plants have had a bit of a head start.

Because of the lack of snow cover this winter, the ground temperatures in our East Anchorage orchard have been quite a bit colder than they have been the last few years. We hit our season low on February 13 with temperatures of 26.5° at 6” and 30° at 12”. The soil temperatures have climbed since then and are currently 31.95° at both 6” and 12”.

The lack of snow and warmer temperatures means that you may need to keep an eye on any potted trees that you might have. They may need some water from time to time since they may thaw out and dry without any snow melt.

If you are growing your raspberries on wire or in rows, remove last year's two-year old canes (the canes that fruited) and head back this year's fruiting canes to 3 feet to encourage laterals (depending on your grow system). If you grow purple raspberries and didn't head back laterals to 8” in the fall, do so now. I recommend that you tie your canes to wires. It seems like we always get some wind just as the fruit is ripening which can make mush out of your fruit.

Many people do not prune Haskaps (Honeyberries). However, they too can benefit from dormant pruning. Pruning should always take the form of thinning cuts, not heading cuts (in other words, only make cuts at the origin point of a branch). The goal of pruning is to increase light and airflow into the center of the bush, rejuvenate old wood if needed, and remove branches that droop onto the ground. This really helps to reduce mold problems due to wet conditions. Haskaps also need to be netted unless you intend to feed the birds. Order now if you need bird netting. I personally use netting from [Plantra](#).

On Saturday, April 5, I will be presenting a pruning explanation/demonstration on nursery trees at [MidValley Greenhouse](#) in Wasilla at 10:00 am. Starting at noon of the same day at the [Alaska Homestead Expo](#) at the Menard Sports Center club members Fred Deiser, Dan Moore, and I will give presentations on growing tree fruit. Dan and Fred are seasoned expert growers of apples, cherries, plums and much more!

APFGA will have an information table at the Alaska Homestead Expo. If you would like to help man the table and answer questions from 9:00 – 1 :00 pm or from 1:00 – 5:00 on either Friday, April 4 or Saturday, April 5, please [email me](#) by midnight Wednesday and I will add you to our list for admission.

Then, on Saturday April 12, we will have the APFGA annual Grafting Workshop at [Begich Middle School](#)(Anchorage). We rely on you (members) to contribute scion wood for the free scion exchange at the workshop. All cultivars are welcome provided you know the name. Please write the cultivar name on the bag, along with your name and general location. No “mystery” scions or wood from cultivars still under patent (ex. Prairie Sensation) FYI, the plant patent on Kinderkrisp has expired, but the trademark may still be in force so if you have it, it should be labeled as MAC 2137. In addition to apple, we always need plum, pear, apricot and cherry scions. Those of you wanting to take scion wood home may want to bring your own zip-lock bags to label and put the scion in.

Members bringing scion wood to the workshop should arrive between 11:30 and Noon. The workshop opens to APFGA members at Noon and then opens to the public at 1:00 pm. The workshop closes at 2:30 pm, and we need to be cleaned up and out of the space by 3:00 pm. If you would like to teach grafting, help, or volunteer (sales, distribute rootstock, distribute scion, instruct, or cleanup) please email [Doug Damberg](#) and let him know what you are willing to do and the hours you are available.

If you placed an order for rootstock, your order will be pre-packaged and ready for you to pick up and pay at the workshop between Noon and 2:30 pm. You will receive an email with your total due. We will also have tree tags, parafilm grafting tape and tree guards for sale. If you can't go to the grafting workshop, please arrange for someone to pick up and pay for your order. Otherwise email me to hold your rootstock (\$5 charge), but know that without snow, I have no way to keep it cold should the days be warm. Credit card, cash or check will be accepted at the grafting workshop. Any payments afterwards will be limited to cash (exact change) or check.

For members who did not pre-order, as well as for the public, we have 150 apple (G.890 and bacatta) and 120 cherry (K. 5) rootstock available to purchase along with possibly a couple of plum (K.1). However, at the workshop you will be limited to initially buying a maximum of three each of apple and cherry rootstock and one of any other rootstock that might be available. Then at 2:15 pm we will make available whatever is still unsold. Please consider bringing some newspaper and plastic bags to wrap the roots of the rootstock you purchase at the workshop.

We received a request asking for someone willing to go to Seldovia in May to do a top-working workshop and a Q & A on growing apples for the community. Depending on the date, a free night at a Seldovia B & B is offered along with reimbursement for the ferry ride from Homer. They are interested in top-working or grafting the earliest varieties such as Parkland, Norland, Yellow Transparent, or Rescue. You would need to bring scion wood which you could get at the Grafting Workshop. Please [email me](#) by April 5, if you would be interested in volunteering to promote apple growing in Seldovia.

We also received a request for an instructor to give one presentation on growing apples or fruit in Alaska for a class at Benny Benson Alternative School in Anchorage next to the Botanical Garden. The class meets Fridays from 1:30-3:15 pm and ends May 9<sup>th</sup>. The organizer has requested a “hands on” class rather than a lecture presentation and has a budget to help pay for any materials. Please [email me](#) by April 5, if you would like to do this and I will put you in touch with the organizer.

About this time, we begin planning our summer orchard/garden tours. If you would be willing to host a tour, please [email me](#) and let me know if you would be available for a blossom tour (around May 24 or 31 depending on weather), or a visit some weekend in July or August.

And finally, on Wednesday, April 23 at 7:00 pm, we will have a Board of Directors meeting to review the grafting workshop among other topics. Members are always welcome to attend board meetings. Simply click the link at the date and time to [join the Zoom meeting](#). Here are links to the proposed [agenda](#), the [past minutes](#) and the full [Zoom invitation](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA

