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Hello Fruit Growers!

We are quickly heading towards bloom! Haskaps (honeyberries) should be in bloom within the next two weeks followed by Nanking cherry, gooseberries and currants in the third week. Then the tree fruit should be in bloom towards the end of the month. This is of course provided we do not have an unusually cold May! But since our plants have met their [chill hour requirements](#) early this year, plant phenology could be ahead of last year.

Keep a watchful eye out for pollinators. (Above: Syrphid fly on [P. tomentosa](#)) It will be interesting to see how the pollinators faired with the unusually warm and mostly snowless winter. I did note my first bumble bee sighting on April 20. Bumble bees are significant pollinators of haskaps, blueberries and raspberries. Yellow jacket and bald-faced hornet queens are important pollinators of currants and gooseberries. Flies, bumblebees, and domestic bees all contribute to pollinating tree fruit. It is recommended that consideration be given to pollinator food sources and habitat in our orchards and gardens.

We mark the start of the Alaska growing season as April 1. This is when we begin to monitor the accrual of [Growing Degree Days](#) in our East Anchorage orchard to track the development of our fruit plants. However, it is worth noting that between January 1 and April 1, had we been tracking GDDs, we would have accumulated 50 GDD/42°. I would not mention this except that this is remarkable (!) and speaks to the unusually warm winter. Those warm days all contributed to our plant's chill hour bank.

Since April 1, the official start (biofix) of the GDD count for the season, we have accrued 105 GDD/42°. The previous four-year average was 89 GDD/42°. The ground has been much colder this spring due to the lack of winter snow cover. Ground temperature at 6" began to finally move above freezing on April 21 and is currently at an averaging of 36°F. However, in most parts of the orchard there is still a frost layer about 8" down.

It should be noted that the amount of GDDs accrued anywhere in Alaska is totally dependent upon the micro-climate in which you are growing. Having your own personal temperature logger and software to track the GDDs in your yard would cost approximately \$300. But it would allow you to know with some certainty what cultivars and varieties stand a chance of fully ripening. Short of that, you can use the pictures of the plant phenology (development) in our orchard to see if your plant development is ahead or behind what we are reporting. [Email me](#) if you would like information on purchasing and setting up your own logger.

Below are photos documenting the phenology of various fruit plants as of May 1, 2025.



If needed, you can still prune, but the timing is no longer ideal. We recommend pruning when the trees are dormant and weather is cold because there is less chance of disease. Bacterial canker has been an issue with cherries the last few years because of the constant wetness. Cherries don't heal quickly at lower temperatures but when it is warmer, there may be more chance of wet weather and infection. Consequently, I have been covering larger pruning cuts on cherries with Doc Farwell's Grafting Sealant, or you could use the Seal and Heal (both available in pints). Covering the large pruning cuts on cherries can lower the possibility of a bacterial infection.

With apples, the possibility of transferring fireblight or fungal infections with pruning also comes with warmer temperatures. If you are pruning in May, it may be advisable to sterilize your pruning tools in between cuts. Just spray your tools with rubbing alcohol and wait for one minute before wiping it off. If you need to top your apple tree to control the tree's height, wait until after bloom. Making the cut then will result in a less vigorous response.

If you had problems with apple scab or other fungal issues, the best strategy is to clean up and remove any leaves or fruits under the trees. They can harbor fungal colonies that can re-infect your trees and fruit. Regardless of whether you had problems the previous season, I generally recommend growers apply a spray of liquid copper fungicide and horticultural oil. The copper provides protection from fungal infections and the oil will suffocate any insects.

Copper and oil can be applied as a combination spray. The oil can help stick the copper. Depending on the plant, copper can be phototoxic to green tissue, so spray before the buds show more than a ¼" green tip. If you want to spray trees with horticultural oil, do so in the morning on a warm day (above 40F) when there is time for the spray to dry and when there are no freezing temperatures 48 hours before or after spraying. Be sure to read labels for proper rates for both the copper and the oil and don't spray within 14 days of using a sulfur product. For more information see the article on application of copper and oil in ONfruit in [Apple Update: April 8, 2025](#).

Along with copper and oil, you should also check your supply of Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis) and Spinosad. Replace your Bt if it is more than 2 years old. (always write your purchase date on biologicals) You will need Bt in a couple of weeks to control leaf-rollers when the haskaps (honeyberries) have finished blooming, or when bees are not out. I generally recommend that while you are spraying Bt, that you go ahead and spray your apple trees as well. If you grow currants or gooseberries, then having Spinosad ready is handy for dealing with the saw-fly larva that inevitably show up later to defoliate our plants. If you have a lot of trees and/or bushes, then it might be time to invest in a pump-up or electric backpack sprayer.

The late Michael Smith in his book "[The Holistic Orchard](#)" recommended that growers spray their orchard floor in the early spring with unsulfured black strap molasses to feed and stimulate the bacteria and fungi in the soil. He recommended a rate of 1-4 quarts per acre for ground application. I spray a mixture of ¼ cup molasses/gallon water per 400 sq. ft. This puts down some trace minerals and carbohydrates and hopefully stimulates the microbial communities in my orchard floor that is covered by mulch.

Speaking of mulch, you should remove any mulch on your strawberries. This will allow the ground to warm up more quickly. Gently cut and remove any remaining leaves from last year being careful not to damage the crowns. If you grow blueberries, this is a good time to make sure any new green shoots from last season are positioned to grow upward. Prune out any dead branches and remove any mummified fruit left on the plants.

I came across three articles that may be of interest to our members. The first deals with animal manure in compost titled: [Can I Safely Use Animal-based Compost in My Garden This Spring](#). The second is for those growing under cover and is titled, [New High Tunnel Nutrient Management Recommendations](#). And the third is about research into the effects of inoculating trees with fungi titled: [Research Targets Root Boosts From Beneficial Fungi](#).

I also received an inquiry from someone in Anchorage looking for a one, two, or three year old Trailman Crab. If you have a tree to sell, please [email Marti](#) with a description of your tree and your price.

May is the month when activities start to ramp up. Here is what is on the horizon for your calendar!

Saturday, May 3, at 10:00 am MidValley Greenhouse Grafting/Top-working demonstration on nursery trees Please note that the workshop will be held on the production side of the greenhouse property at [5331 E Blue Lupine](#).

Saturday, May 17, at 1:30 pm [Airport Heights Elementary](#). Grafting/Top-working demonstration on Prunus maackii Meet in front of the school on Alder Drive at the trees between the drop-off drive and road.

Saturday, May 31, at 1:30 pm [Gov't Hill Commons](#) Orchard/Blossom Tour

These events provide opportunities for learning beyond the workshop or tour. Often it is just in casual conversation with others that we learn something new or important to our success. In any case, I hope to see you at some of the upcoming events!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA