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Hello Fruit Growers!

On a somewhat comical note, above is a picture of our orchard floor on May 9, after I had finished putting down 6 yds of wood mulch. My routine is to test our soil in August. At the beginning of October, I added amendments, composted chicken manure, and 11 bags of leaves (thank you Gary!). We save and crush our eggshells. That calcium supplement went on the orchard earlier this month followed by the wood mulch. Of course, our two pet chickens accepted the challenge and had the orchard floor completely tossed after one week! Since then, in addition to the trees and bushes, the orchard floor has burst forth with blue bells, cranesbill geranium, water-mellon berries, tulips, alfalfa, anemone, crocus, chives, mustard, and soon some purple asparagus should be pushing up. What I call the green explosion amazes me every year.

We are at or are moving towards full bloom depending upon the cultivar. As expected the trees are about a week ahead of last year due to the accrual of chill hours during the winter. The recent string of three cool, cloudy and wet summers has made biennial bearing an ongoing issue with the apples. However, thanks to reducing the crop load and more open pruning, the reduced return bloom isn't as bad as it was two summers ago on our Carroll, State Fair, Simonet and Whitney apples. The tree that is the least inclined to biennial bearing is Prairie Magic. If I were growing for sales in my micro-climate, I would plant a block of Prairie Magic. It is a top performer in our orchard.

Cherries are beginning to bloom profusely. Hopefully, the weather cooperates, and we have a warm bloom period that is relatively rain-free with calm winds for the pollinators. Black currants are also looking good, as are the arctic kiwis and haskaps (honey berries). Regarding haskaps, I recently learned that closely related cultivars are incompatible pollinators. Check out the pollination chart at the bottom of this [Fruit Update](#) from the University of Minnesota if you are not getting the fruit set you think you should.

This winter was tough on a lot of plants despite or perhaps because of the frequent warming followed by precipitous drops in temperature. What has been particularly baffling has been the winter damage on last year's grafted apple trees that were over-wintered in pots. On several the whip looks alive but is not leafing out. In many cases, the rootstock is budding out, so I know the rootstock is alive. This has happened with various cultivars on a variety of rootstocks, including bacatta, G.890, G.257, and G.41. On some, I notice a nascent bud breaking on the original piece of scion. On those, it may be possible to grow a new whip. It also appears that I have lost 7 out of 12 open pollinated seedling Prairie Magic apples that I had started in 2022. In addition, I had topworked the stump of a crab apple last year with 8 Winekist bark grafts. They had all grown 18-24" but only 3 are alive and leafing out.

As for apple trees in the ground, you have a number of tasks before you. If you had less than 6" new growth last season, then you might want to fertilize your trees now when they are in bloom. To measure last year's growth just find the tip of a branch and follow it back to last year's growth ring. If needed, often just a bag of composted steer manure lightly spread under the tree to 3 feet outside of the drip line will do the trick. If fertilizer is required, it may be an indication that you should send out a soil sample for analysis in August.

If you tie your tree to a stake during winter, then you should untie it until the fruit begins to size up. If you use vinyl tree wraps on your fruit trees for vole protection, they should be removed during the summer as they can hold moisture against the bark in wet summers. Your also need to get your scissors out and thin your apples after bloom. Unlike crabapples, you will get larger apples if you thin the fruit of regular apples. The sooner you thin after fruit set, the better. I usually select the fruitlets from the king blossoms (first to open) and I only leave one fruit every 9-12". Less fruit if the tree tends to be biennial. If the branch is small in diameter, I may only leave one fruit close to the trunk, unless I don't think the branch can support it.

If you grafted apples onto G.890 rootstock last year, it may very well have blossoms already. I do not recommend that you keep those flowers. Better to have the tree put its energy into growing bigger rather than setting fruit. I have a fourth year Prairie Magic on G.935 that flowered each of the previous two years. But this will be the first year that I let it set fruit. Do not head the whip like you might on seedling rootstock. Branches will still develop that you can later select for your scaffolds.

The highly variable and warm temperatures followed by sudden cold with little to no snow cover in Southcentral Alaska was not kind to our blueberries either. Many have winter damage. The cultivar that faired the best was Northblue. Out of six Northblue plants, 3 were undamaged, 2 had approximately 25% damage, and 1 had about 50% damage. If you grow blueberries, you should apply the first of two rounds of fish emulsion at the rate of 2 Tbsp/gal/25 sq. ft. when they bloom and follow up with a second feeding one month later.

Similar winter damage happened to our gooseberries. Hinnomaki Yellow came through very well with hardly any damage. Hinnomaki Red on the other hand is only leafing out on 15% of the plant. Jewel gooseberry has about 50% winter injury. Blueberries and gooseberries benefit from snow cover. For gooseberries, I highly recommend the cultivar Hinnomaki Yellow. The Yellow has great flavor, and compared to Hinnomaki Red, it ripens earlier and has demonstrated a tolerance to a wider range of weather issues.

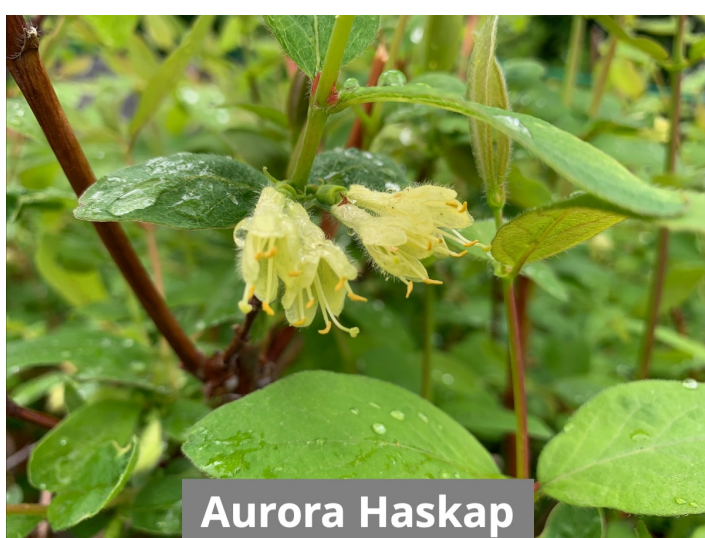
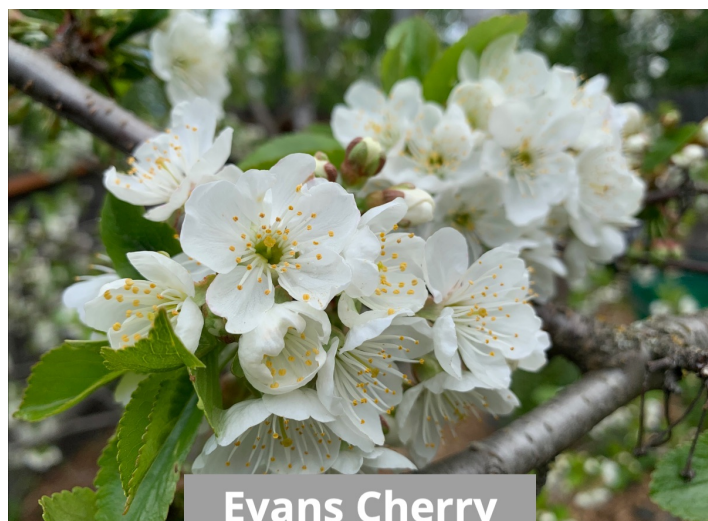
Raspberries are performing as expected. Our red (Killarney), and purple (Royalty) came through winter fine. However, Fall Gold is somewhat marginal, and a number of canes had die-back or were slow to bud out. We like the somewhat unique flavor of Fall Gold, but from a performance standpoint the yellow raspberry Honey Queen seems to laugh at winter and is vigorous right away in the spring. Our Honey Queen came from member Tim Pritchett who also supplies plants to Anchorage Mill and Feed.

If you fertilize your raspberries, now is the time to fertilize your plants. Use composted manure or a balanced N-P-K fertilizer and put down 3 oz of N per 10' of row. Remember that the N-P-K numbers are percentages by weight. So, a 10-10-10 fertilizer is 10% Nitrogen, 10% Phosphorus and 10% Potassium.

Yesterday, we had our first orchard tour of the season at the Government Hill Commons. Many thanks to David Mitchell for helping with the tour. The weather stayed below 55°, it rained intermittently, but it was nevertheless very nice to spend some time with everyone and talk about growing fruit trees. In the evening the skies cleared up and the sun came out allowing some bees to fly. Fortunately, the sun doesn't set until after 11 pm!

Regarding growing degree days (GDD) in Anchorage, May has followed a similar pattern to the previous two years. As of June 1, our seasonal total stands at 402 GDD/42°F. having only accrued 297 GDD/42° in May. The previous 4-year average for the month of May is 311 GDD/42°, but in only one of those four years was May "normal" and sunny. Global warming is affecting the jet stream which seems to be putting Southcentral Alaska into a perpetual maritime climate.

We are at a critical period in the growing season. As we saw last year, wet, cool and windy weather can negatively impact pollination, especially for cherries. I have seen a few bees on our cherries, but there are a lot of blossoms and next week's weather is not predicted to be conducive to pollinators. As expected, soil temperatures are a bit cooler than recent years. The average temperature at 6" is still only 48° F. Below are photos showing the phenological development of various fruits.



I came across an interesting article titled the "[The hidden complexity of the Montmorency tart cherry genome](#)." As many of you know, Michigan is the country's major producer of Montmorency sour cherries. Michigan State University conducted a rootstock trial at their Northwest research center grafting different cultivars to various rootstocks. At the end of 6 years, none of the Montmorency grafted to K.5 (Krymsk 5) were alive. A couple of summers ago I had grafted Montmorency on K.5, and my 2nd year tree looked great going into last winter and I thought I might beat the odds. However, the tree did not bud out this spring even though the rootstock was still alive. I have a Montmorency of the same age grafted to P. Maackii, and it is fine. So it appears that there could be a compatibility issue between the Montmorency cultivar and the K.5 rootstock.

My question to you (the membership) concerns whether you have experienced any compatibility issues with Evans (Bali) on K.5. Please [email me](#) this next week if you have had second year or older grafted trees fail over winter on K.5. Although my immediate focus is on Evans, please share any other observations if you have have experienced problems with other cultivars. The K.5 cherry rootstock has demonstrated good hardiness and tolerates our cool, wet soils. But, if there are incompatibility issues with commonly grown cultivars like Evans, Meteor, or Northstar, then I want to know. Your responses will help me decide how to proceed with next year's rootstock order.

Thank you to everyone who trialed the Old Home x Farmingdale 97 pear rootstock last year! It appears that the OHxF97rootstock is not the best choice for Alaska unless you want a rootstock for growing pear inside a greenhouse or high tunnel. Pyrus ussuriensis is a much better pear rootstock for growing outside in Alaska. It wakes up early, is more vigorous, and appears harder than OHxF97. My strategy has been to graft P. ussuriensis with Summer Crisp to use as an interstem. Summer Crisp has good grafting compatsibility with European, Russian and Asian pear cultivars, and Summercrisp has the additional benefit being a good pollinator if needed.

Yael Hickok who manages the Boyer Orchard and Greenhouse sent some apple samples in for DNA testing. She learned that the mystery tree in Anchorage on 8th and M is Oriole, the tree on 15 St. is Mantet, and what was labeled Kline #2 is actually Jerseymac. Yael heads a non-profit called "The Friends of Boyer's Orchard" which is working to raise money to purchase the property. You can read about it in a wonderful Anchorage Daily News article titled, "[Group Ballies to Preserve a Hidden Orchard in the Heart of Anchorage's Commercial Sprawl](#)."

In other real estate news, APFGA founding member Bob Purvis is considering putting his Idaho orchard and nursery up for sale in the next 12-24 months. He writes that "because of all the cold-hardy, rare, and high-quality fruit cultivars in the orchard, I (he) would like to give the first opportunity to buy it to someone in Alaska who has a passion for fruit growing." I encourage anyone even slightly tempted, to read Bob's detailed [description of the property](#). This would be a wonderful opportunity for someone interested in growing fruit at a larger scale.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA