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Hello Fruit Growers!

We have crossed the summit of the summer solstice, and we have begun to lose time as we begin the tilt back towards winter. So far, we are losing about a minute each day of our 19 plus hours of daylight. So, there is plenty of daylight to get things done in the orchard and to enjoy being outside without our winter coats.

Above is a picture of a bed of Annapolis June-bearing strawberries. We grow strawberries in low-tunnels in 4' x 8' raised beds with hoops made from 10' electrical conduit using a [4' hoop bending jig](#). Each bed accommodates a bundle of 25 strawberry plants. We then put greenhouse (UV resistant) plastic sheeting (10' wide) over the hoops and secure it with large binder clips. Although the hoops and plastic covering can withstand snow loads, we fold up the plastic once the strawberries are done and don't cover the beds again until spring.

The ends of the low tunnels are covered with bird netting to keep critters out and can be closed with plastic to retain more warmth in early spring. This advances the strawberries two-three weeks or more compared to strawberries in the open. In addition to protection from bird strikes and ground squirrels, the plastic covering reduces mold from rain. So far, Cavendish is our favorite June-bearing cultivar regarding productivity, hardiness, and most importantly flavor. We love seeing the look on people's faces when they taste a real strawberry ripened on the plant!

Our main pest on strawberries is [spittlebugs](#). They create little foamy masses to hide in while they feed on the plants. They generally do not cause much damage, but I manually squeeze the foam to find the nymphs and squish them. They start at the base of the plants and by now will often be found on the underside of the leaves. Leaves with spittlebugs will show some deformation or cupping. If you are averse to squishing them, they can be washed off with blast of water. The foam can impact the fruit from a cosmetic standpoint.



First Cavendish almost ripe



Spittlebug de-foamed

Another pest that appears to be having a banner year is aphids. For the first time we had wooly aphids on the haskaps and regular aphids on the strawberries, the tender new shoots of Royalty Raspberry and some apples. I generally choose the most benign approach first by either squishing the bugs by hand, using an insecticidal soap, or horticultural oil. The surrounding birch and P. padus trees are full of aphids this year and are dropping copious amounts of dew.

[Sawfly larvae](#) appeared on our Hinnomaki Yellow Gooseberry on June 15. We grow a native currant as a landscape plant that usually attracts the larvae first. However, this year I wasn't aware that they were around until I saw a denuded branch on the gooseberry. Even if they completely denude a plant, rarely does that kill it. But, once they appear in your orchard or yard, I recommend that you spray all of your currants and gooseberries with Spinosad. When purchasing, look for a spray that has Spinosad listed as the active ingredient such as [Monterey Garden Insect Spray](#).

Perhaps the most ubiquitous insect this season is the [fruittree leafroller](#). I have applied 3 sprays of Bt starting when the haskaps were entering bloom and concluding with apple petal fall. It is normal to have a few leafrollers in the haskaps, but this year they are omnipresent and are on the blueberries, raspberries, apples, and cherries. Our chickens love to eat the leafrollers but lacking opposable thumbs they require us to pick and open the leaves for a little snack.

The mild winter must have favored the aphids and leafrollers. The leafrollers can damage apples and haskaps when the leaves are touching the fruitlets, or the apple fruitlet cluster provides a home with a mass of flower petals. When thinning apples, I always remove the mat of spent flowers, if present, to check for leafroller damage before choosing what apple to keep. I then drop any fruitlets that are damaged by feeding holes.



Fruittree Leafrollers



Leafroller feeding damage

Depending upon when your cherries were in bloom in Southcentral Alaska, your fruit set was either great or just mediocre. Our cherries are coming out of shuck and the fruit set is better than last year, but the weather was not particularly cooperative. Many of the bountiful blossoms failed to set fruit. Cool temperatures, rain, and wind kept pollinators away, with occasional breaks of sun and warmth during three weeks of cherry bloom. The timing of when the trees/bushes were in bloom determined the fruit set. If the blossoms were viable during the warm/sunny breaks, then cherries got pollinated.

I finished thinning the late blooming apples last week. This is another weather induced biennial year meaning that if you have apple cultivars that tend to be biennial and bear full crops on alternate years, then this is another "off" year resulting from the maritime climate Southcentral has experienced over the past three seasons. The pervasive cloudy, wet and cool weather of those summers tended to inhibit the setting of flowers during the "on" summers when the trees struggled with limited available carbohydrates for the demands of both fruit and flower set. Remember, it is the limiting of your fruit set on biennial trees during their "on" years that sets the stage for return bloom the next summer. Cultivars that we grow that have resisted the biennial urge include Lee 27, Golden Uralian, and Prairie Magic.

Our last significant rain was .75" between June 7-9. Your need to water depends upon the water holding capacity of your soil type, the nature of the orchard floor, the age of the trees, and the type of rootstock. Our soil is dominated by clay with a heavy layer of mulch that reduces evaporation. The mature trees in our orchard are 15 years old on full-size seedling rootstock with extensive roots systems so they are still doing OK. The younger trees, especially those on clonal rootstocks with more limited roots are benefiting from some water. Clay soils can be deceptive in that they can appear somewhat moist, but the water is so tightly bound in the soil that plant roots can't access it. You can dig an eight-inch test hole to check on soil moisture. Additionally, if you have a variety of plants on the orchard floor, they can also indicate if the soil has low water availability. I like to keep an eye on the Crane's Bill Geraniums and Blue Bells to see if they are appearing thirsty.

We do regularly water potted plants and the small fruits as they are in raised beds or in gardens that have more loamy soil without extensive mulching. Keeping strawberries, haskaps, raspberries, currants and gooseberries adequately watered is important during bloom and while the fruit is developing. Plants struggling to get adequate water will have reduced berry size.

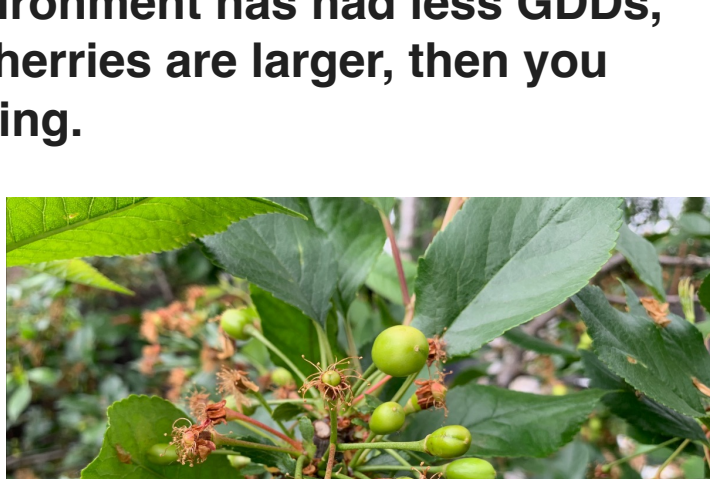
From a Growing Degree Day (GDD) perspective June was not great. We accrued only 478 GDD/42° in June versus the previous 4-year average of 569 GDD/42°. As of July 1 in East Anchorage our YTD total using April 1 as the biofix date was 880 GDD/42°F versus a 4-year average of 970. Soil temperature at 6" is 57° F. Prairie Magic apples are between 20-28 mm, and depending upon when the Evans cherries were in bloom, range from just coming out of shuck to 12 mm.

You probably have noticed that I always state our location in relation to GDDs since every location in Alaska, and even on a property, is a micro-climate. If you are interested in monitoring the GDDs in your environment just [email me](#) for the equipment list to get started. The equipment and software costs around \$300. It will enable you to have much greater insight into what your micro-climate will allow you to grow.

Short of tracking your own GDDs, below are pictures of the plant development in our orchard that you can use to compare with what is happening in your micro-climate. If your fruit is behind what you see below, then your environment has had less GDDs, and conversely, if your apples or cherries are larger, then you have had more GDDs than I am listing.



Prairie Magic Apple



Evans (Bali) Cherry



Aurora Haskap (Honeyberry)



Northblue Blueberry



Titania Black Currant



Killarney Red Raspberry

I recommend that growers go back and carefully examine your apple trees to see if you missed apples when thinning and that your fruit load on each branch and the tree is appropriate. Be sure to check the underside of the branches for fruit clusters hidden by the leaves. Vertical sprouts can be removed with thinning cuts at any time. And if you need to control the height of your tree, July is a good month to head the tree back to a non-vigorous lateral or upward facing bud without inducing excessive growth.

If you haven't already, be sure to net your haskaps/honeyberries. The birds don't care if the berries are ripe or not. You should also thin the new shoots (primocanes) in your raspberries. This will increase air circulation and reduce mold issues when it rains. Purple raspberry primocanes should be headed when they get over 3 feet to stimulate laterals.

Last year was a no-show regarding yellow jackets. However, be prepared to set out traps should yellow jackets return as they can feed on and damage haskaps, cherries, blueberries, gooseberries, and raspberries. I recommend something like these [yellow jacket traps](#). If needed, here is an article with a [bait recipe](#).

In an earlier newsletter I had commented that I had planted a Montmorency cherry that I had grown on P. maackii rootstock since the cultivar seems incompatible with Krymsk 5. This drew some comments about the pros and cons of using this rootstock. On the pro side, my experience indicates that the P. maackii is relatively resistant to bacterial canker which is an issue in our environment. It seems to have good graft compatibility, and I haven't noticed a reduced fruit size on producing grafts of Juliet and Romeo. As for Montmorency I will know more next summer if pollination is successful. P. maackii is being used in rootstock breeding programs. You can read more in the article [Armillaria Resistance Explored](#).

In other news, on a Maine island [historians discover one of the oldest living apple trees in North America](#). According to John Bunker the find on the island of Verona is the only living example in North America of a Drap D'Or de Bretagne. The 200+ year old tree is one of the earliest genetic ancestors of many of the common apple cultivars of today.

Judith James, a friend of Homer, sent word of a memorial on June 28, for [David Schroger](#) who passed away in February. His orchard was on the South facing slope off East End Road. We have friends who live just up the hill from his orchard and I have fond memories of visiting a couple of times. Dave was a remarkable individual, as well as a pioneer in fruit growing in Homer. He kept detailed records of weather and even made a [chart of the bloom dates](#) for various cultivars between 1997 and 2016. His orchard consisted of about 60 sweet and sour cherries along with some apples.

Please put it in your calendar that Dan and Nancy Moore will be hosting an orchard tour on Saturday, August 9 at their Fire Apple Orchard in Big Lake. More information will be forthcoming. It would also be nice to have an orchard tour either July 12 or 19 in either the Chugiak or Anchorage area. If you would be interested in hosting a tour on either of those dates, please [email me](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

