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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

I am sending the September newsletter one week early so that you have some warning of the month’s upcoming events. September is generally the culmination of our growing season and with that comes the pressing of apples and fruit tasting.

With early apples ripening, our first event will be an apple pressing in Anchorage on Saturday, September 6, in the [St. Mary’s Episcopal Church](#) parking lot. Apples can be picked when ripe and held if necessary until the pressing. The cooler the storage, the better. Apples that have gone soft but not rotten are fine for pressing. For those that want to press Yellow Transparent, I recommend that you mix your buckets of those apples with a firmer variety so that they grind and press better. I will send out a sign-up sheet and more information on September 1.

A second pressing for the later apples will be held in Wasilla on Saturday, September 20 at MidValley Greenhouse. You will receive an email with a sign-up sheet and more information for that event on September 15.

Last year we held an early apple/fruit tasting, but the event was poorly attended. In response to my inquiry in the August newsletter, interest in the tasting appears low. Consequently, the decision has been made to forego the early tasting but to continue the late tasting. The 2025 apple/fruit tasting will occur on Saturday, September 27 at 1:30 pm in Wasilla at MidValley Greenhouse. This tasting is always well attended with a large number of members submitting fruit.

For all three events there is a need for members to volunteer. In particular, the Board of Directors wants members to learn how to operate, set-up, and take down the apple presses and grinder. Right now, that information resides with a couple of folks who have been providing this service for the past 7 years. That needs to change or these events may not happen in the future. As an inducement, the board has discussed offering a stipend next year to members willing to operate/supervise a press or grinder who have received training this year on set-up, operation, and clean-up. This could be you or a family member. A volunteer link will go out with each of the pressing emails if you would like to apprentice to become an apple press master.

The growing degree day (GDD) total for our East Anchorage orchard was 2034 GDD/42° as of August 24, 2025. Ground temperature at 6” is averaging 61° F. Ground moisture is fairly dry at 6 “, but mature trees on seedling rootstock do not appear stressed.



Jewel Black Raspberry

The mostly dry weather led to a banner summer for small berries. We had excellent crops of black currants (Swedish Black, Titania) and raspberries, including some neglected black raspberries (above) that apparently liked the last winter. Our red raspberries (Killarney) were of the best quality since we put them in. Normally, I separate out the grade A berries and freeze the rest for juice. This year the reds have almost all been grade A. The purple raspberry Royalty is our biggest producer by weight. The berries are large and the plants are very productive if one heads the primo canes when they get over 3 feet. Although many are not keen on Royalty’s mild flavor, I like the fruit for juice, preserves, and wine-making.

Romance Cherries after 1800 GDD/42° (1700 GDD/42° for Carmine Jewel) are prone to cracking should we get a soaking rain. In East Anchorage we just passed 2000 GDD/42°. Consequently, I have been picking and processing Romeo and Juliet because rain is forecast for later this week. I tested for sugar on the front Juliet on P. maackii and the sugars were above 14°. After pitting the 15 lbs of cherries, the juice in the pit box of the pitter had a brix of 16°. The cherries from this tree were of exceptional quality. Large size, good sugar levels with only 16 culls!

The back orchard Romeo bush cherries (11 lbs) were somewhat smaller, had many more culls, but still registered a brix of 15.5°. We have another Juliet bush in a cooler spot that is not as ripe as I would like. However, with an inch of rain in the forecast for later this week, I will need to pick it now. Our Evans (Bali) cherries are relatively crack resistant. Even with torrential rains like we had last summer, only 25% cracked. Consequently, I will leave Evans on the trees until mid-September for maximum sugar and flavor development.



Juliet (R) & Romeo (L) Cherries

At this point in the season, you should be examining your grafts and new growth on your plants. I had a lot of new growth on blueberries that I have tied up so that the stems harden in an upward shape. Same thing with the floppy growth of the Titania black currant. Once the berries were off, I trussed up the plant and put in stakes so that the new growth would harden vertically and that snow would not flatten the plant over winter. The new growth from grafts needs to be trained to grow how you want them. On rootstocks, that sometimes means tying the new growth to a stake so that it is growing straight. Or, with topwork grafts, it could mean putting in spreaders so that the limb angle is adjusted to what you want. In any case, the point is to move plant material into the shape that you want before the stems harden or lignify. This is especially important to do with limb extensions that you are training for espalier.

As apples ripen, it is normal for trees to prematurely drop fruit. You can use the drops to assess ripeness. Check to see if the background color has shifted. Cut the apple open to see if the seeds have begun to turn black. Take a slice and squeeze a drop of juice onto a [refractometer](#) to check the brix. And finally, taste the apple to see how far along the starch conversion has progressed.

Members Dave and Diana Evans have noted that the Municipality of Anchorage is working on a new ordinance intended to increase housing density within ½ mile of transit routes. The proposed ordinance would increase the allowable heights for buildings. New construction could cast a shadow onto adjoining property which would not be ideal for growing fruit. Dave and Diana asked that I share a [fact sheet](#) which has links to the project website, current draft of the ordinance, and how to share any feedback.

If you have yet to submit your 2026 rootstock request, please do so. Order form link was in the August 1 newsletter.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

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