

*Merced County*

*Blossom Tour*





### ***Almond Blossom Tour Of North Merced County***

Almond bloom is approximately February 25-28 ± one week.

The tour begins at the Hwy 99 Bradbury Road overpass south of Turlock and just north of Delhi.

Turn right at go west on Bradbury

Turn left and go south on Link past Turlock Country Club

Turn right and go west on August

If you would like to taste cheese and picnic at the Hilmar Cheese Company, turn left on Lander/Hwy 156 and turn left into the parking areas.

After leaving the cheese company, turn right and go west on August Road

Turn left and go south on Columbus

Turn left and go east on Williams

Turn right and go south on Lander/Hwy 165

Just after you cross the Merced River, which originates in Yosemite, turn left and go east on River Road, which becomes Vine Wood (there will be Hagaman Park and play grounds on the left). You will pass several varieties of winegrapes and the largest single winery in the World - E&J Gallo (not open to the public).

About 2.5 miles east of the winery turn right and go south on Washington

Turn left and go east on Westside Blvd

Turn right and go south on Lincoln

Turn left and go east on Atwater-Jordan

Turn right and go south on Applegate

Turn left and go east on White Crane around a high density peach orchard

Turn left on Swan one block

Turn right and go east on Mulberry

Turn left and go north on Buhach over the freeway

Follow the signs north to the Castle Air Museum where they have a Café, picnic tables and restrooms. You can also visit the Challenger Learning Center inside the main Castle gates.

From Castle turn right and go northwest on Santa Fe

Turn right and go north on Shaffer

Turn left and go northwest on Oakdale across the Merced River

Turn left and go west on Turlock Rd one block

Turn left and go south on Lee

Turn right and go west on Bradbury one block

Turn left and go south on Alves one block

Turn right and go west on El Capitan one block

Turn right and go northwest on Santa Fe to the hamlet of Ballico

Turn left at the stop sign and go south on Ballico Ave one block

Turn right and go west on Bradbury to Hwy 99 where the tour ends

#### **Other things to do in North Merced County:**

- Camping and fishing at McConnell State Recreation Area on the banks of the Merced River (take Ballico or Pepper Roads south until they end - look for signs) (209) 826-1196
- Camping and fishing at George Hatfield State Recreation Area southwest of Hilmar (209) 632-1852 State parks website: [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

**M**arch is the time of year that several varieties of trees are blooming. Here are a few tips on how to tell what you are seeing:

Almond and apricot trees have white blossoms. Apricots are the first commercial orchard crop to bloom and they are followed closely by almonds. They both have a rough brown trunk and will have several large branches trained to create a large spherical shape. Commercial apricot orchards, very common on the Westside, are rare on the east side of the county.

Peaches and nectarines being the same species (a nectarine is simply any variety of peach without fuzz) bloom next and have two types of blossoms. Some have showy pink blossoms and some varieties have inconspicuous reddish-pink flowers that are so small that you need to walk up to them to see their colors. We call these non-showy types. You can tell the non-showy types are blooming because the whole orchard will have a dark reddish color. Peaches are shorter than almonds and are trained to an open vase shape with a flat top. Some cling peach orchards are pruned to a cordon system similar to the wine grapes in the area. This system, while expensive to develop, allows the tree to be pruned, thinned and harvested without ladders - A feature that both the farmer and workers like very much!

Plum trees bloom with the peach trees, but have compact white blossoms. The trees are shorter than peaches and have very few side branches coming off the upright scaffolds. The older trees will have a gnarled trunk.

Prune trees look just like plums since they are so closely related. Most of the prunes are southeast of Merced and on the Westside of the county.

You may spot a few Asian pears. These trees could be pruned in any fashion and will resemble plum and peach trees. They have larger white flowers and bloom around the same time as plums. The bark on the Asian pears is smoother than both the peach and plum trees.

Walnuts are much larger than the fruit trees and have white smooth bark down to the graft union where the Persian walnut scion wood meets the dark rough California Black Walnut rootstock. All of our fruit and nut trees along with many of the grapes are grown on rootstock, which are resistant to soil pests and diseases such as nematodes, drown and root rot, oak root fungus and others. This allows the farmer to grow imported varieties without chemicals to kill these pests. Walnuts are wind-pollinated and do not need showy flowers to attract insects. In fact, walnuts have separate male flowers (catkins), which release the pollen and female flowers (pistillate) to catch the pollen.

Almond farmers try to set as many flowers as possible so they have to hire beekeepers to place two or three hives per acre to help carry the pollen from the pollinizer variety to the main variety and vice-versa. Since most stone fruit trees set more fruit than they can size anyway and have to be thinned (an expensive operation), bees are not needed for these four crops. Apple orchards, kiwi fruit, and some prune orchards have bees brought in on occasion. Other orchard crops that you will find in Merced County are figs, pistachios, black boysenberries, cherries, olives, pecans, wine and raisin grapes, citrus and persimmons.

Row crops that you may see in the region would be sweet potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, bell peppers, strawberries, broccoli, reddicho and all types of melons.

Field crops in the region are cotton, grains, corn, alfalfa, sugar beets and some rice.

## *Blossom Bloom Time*

ALMONDS February 25-28 +/- 10 days

PLUMS March 1-5 +/- 10 days

PEACHES March 10 +/- 10 days

APPLES March 27 +/- 10 days

APRICOTS March 1-10 +/- 10 days

*Merced County is one of  
California's top five producers of:*

- Cantaloupes
- Sheep & Lambs
- Tomatoes
- Honey
- Almonds
- Apricots
- Figs
- Peaches
- Cotton
- Hay & Alfalfa
- Sugar Beets
- Eggs & Chickens for Meat
- Hogs & Pigs
- Turkeys
- Sweet Potatoes
- Milk & Cream
- Oats
- Cattle & Calves

Merced County is ranked sixth over all for total Ag output in the nation.

Merced County is also a major center of agricultural processing and food/wine manufacturing.

**Sources:**

California Agricultural Resource Directory 2000, [www.cdfr.ca.gov](http://www.cdfr.ca.gov)

1997 US Census of Agriculture, [www.usda.gov/nass](http://www.usda.gov/nass)

## **Thank You**

**Maxwell Norton** - Farm Advisor,  
*Deciduous Fruits & Vines*

*University of California  
Cooperative Extension  
Merced County*

Your knowledge and the time  
you have invested in this  
brochure is much appreciated.

## **Photos Courtesy of:**

- Robert Dayton
- Maxwell Norton



## **Merced Conference & Visitors Bureau**

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For more information  
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