



The Blossom Trail

By Ruth Ann Angus

Lots of people have a hard time finding any incentive to go to Fresno. Well, once a year there is a spectacular reason to do so. For a few weeks in late February and March, the orchards in the surrounding farmland come alive with shades of bright pink and white. It's time to travel the Blossom Trail.

The Blossom Trail is 62 miles of beauty. Include the alternate route, The Foothill Trail, and this will give you a view of the many wildflowers that flourish on the rolling hillsides.

Many of the orchards along the Trail have crop identification signs, which were put up by the Fresno Kiwanis, County Farm Bureau and Chamber of Commerce.

Blossom season actually starts when rows and rows of almond trees break into bloom in February. The lovely small white flowers grace the trees and sprinkle the ground like a dusting of snow. Farmers often plant two or more varieties of almond trees to aid in cross-pollination by bees, and the flowers can be either white or pale pink. The almond tree has slender, pale green leaves and is deciduous, which means it loses its leaves in winter. Ten varieties of almonds account for more than 90 percent of the crop. They are harvested by machine from August to October. California is the only place in North America where almonds are grown.

Plum blossoms are also white with a touch of pink in the center. More than 200 varieties of plums are grown in the Central Valley, with a harvest season beginning in May and continuing to the end of September.

Apricot trees sport small pink petals, and 12 varieties are grown in the Central Valley. Their harvest season lasts two to three weeks in May.

Apple trees bloom in late March to mid-April. They have delicate white blossoms with pink centers. Six varieties of apples are grown in Fresno County, and harvest begins in late August and continues through October.

Probably the most spectacular blooms are those of the peach and nectarine orchards. The color of these blossoms ranges from deep pink to red. Both peaches and nectarines usually flower at the same time during the first half of March. Cross-pollination is not required, so only a single variety may be planted in an orchard. More than 100 varieties are grown commercially. Harvest of the fruit starts in late April and runs through early October.

Not to be outdone by all the others, citrus reigns in the Central Valley. Orange blossoms are small and white and not nearly so grand as those of other fruit trees, but they do have one thing that stands out—fragrance. Driving by an orange grove at the peak of bloom affords one the most aromatic scent. Navel and Valencia oranges are the most common citrus grown in the Fresno area.

The official Blossom Trail runs east of Route 99 on Jensen Avenue and through the small towns of Sanger, Reedley, Minkler and Centerville. The route jigs and jags through southern Fresno. Maps of the route are available from the Fresno Convention & Visitors Bureau; call (800) 788-0836, or visit www.gofresnocounty.com for latest blooming news and map downloads.

These small towns along the way are fun places to explore. Plan to make a day of it and either schedule food stops in the areas mentioned, or bring a picnic.



Simonian Farms on Jensen has some picnic tables and a collection of historical tractors and other antique farm equipment. There are picnic areas at Pioneer Park in Reedley, and you might want to visit the Reedley Opera House for lunch and a little comedy

and music. Nearby, too, is the Mennonite Quilting Center, where incredible handcrafted quilts are made and displayed. In Sanger, drop in to see the Depot Museum, a 112-year-old structure that houses the Brehler collection of Indian baskets, replicas of Victorian homes and the Sanger Flume and Lumber exhibit. This railroad town was once the destination of the longest logging flume in the world, which transported lumber from the mountains 54 miles away.

As you can see, there is much to do and see along the Blossom Trail, but foremost is viewing the beautiful fruit trees. Please respect the orchard properties that

are private and do not walk into the orchards or pick the blossoms. Beware of the bees—necessary for pollination but nasty if you get stung. Most of all, enjoy your day in Fresno County. ❀



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