

Blossom time

Nothing says spring quite like the panorama of showy blossoms that burst forth in orchards throughout the central San Joaquin Valley. Each year, more than 20,000 people celebrate this annual awakening by

visiting the Fresno County Blossom Trail, a 62-mile, self-guided motor or bicycle tour featuring stone-fruit orchards, citrus groves and vineyards.

While some growers place signs along the road telling what you're seeing, many do not — leaving visitors to guess

what they're gazing at. The guide below showcases some of the most common blossoms found in our area. As you drive along the trail, we hope it'll help you figure out what's growing where.

■ For more on the Blossom Trail, including a map, see Page E2.

Story by Margaret Slaby and illustrations by Bob Campbell, The Fresno Bee



Almond ▲

■ **Blossoms:** Almonds are the earliest blossoming stone fruit tree. Five white or pale pink petals surround the bud center. Trees have lots of single blossoms, 50,000 or more.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In mid-February to early March.

■ **The tree:** Almond trees have a full canopy with a dense branch structure. They are pruned to a vase shape and have a long trunk. The trees' height (20 to 25 feet tall) and weed-free orchard floor make almonds easily identifiable.



Lemon ▼

■ **Blossoms:** Made of five elongated, aromatic, waxy white petals. Blossoms can be solitary or in clusters.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In April.

■ **The tree:** Lemons keep their oblong leaves all year. Lemon trees usually are topped at 10 to 12 feet each year (commercial orange trees are not). Leaves are aromatic when crushed.



Orange ▲ (navel and Valencia)

■ **Blossoms:** Made up of five elongated, aromatic white petals. Blossoms can be solitary or in clusters.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In April.

■ **The tree:** Orange trees have leaves all year. The oval leaves are about half the size of the lemon's and are not aromatic when crushed.

California ▼ poppy

■ **Flowers:** February to June.

■ **Characteristics:** This perennial native to California has slender, upright stems 8 to 24 inches long with finely divided, blue-green leaves. Single flowers have 2-inch-wide satiny petals in colors that range from pale yellow to deep orange. The blooms close at night or on overcast days.



Apple ▲

■ **Blossoms:** Five white to pale pink petals surround the bud center. Blossoms appear in clusters at the end of short fruit spurs when the tree begins to leaf.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In late March.

■ **The tree:** Apples typically are pruned to a single straight trunk with branches growing laterally.



Cherry ▲

■ **Blossoms:** Five mostly white (some pink) petals surround the bud center. Blossoms resemble the apricot's, but cherry blossoms are more abundant and appear on shorter spurs.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In early to mid-March.

■ **The tree:** Cherry trees have upright branches, heavy blossoms and trunks with smooth bark.



▲ Peach and nectarine

■ **Blossoms:** A single or double whorl of five bright pink or red petals surround the bud center. Blossoms appear on small shoots.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In mid-February to mid-March.

■ **The tree:** Trees are pruned in a vase shape so branches can carry a lot of weight. The vase starts 18 to 24 inches from the ground.



▲ Plum

■ **Blossoms:** Five petals that are mostly white (some have a pinkish tinge at the center) surround the bud center.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In late February to early March.

■ **The tree:** Plum trees are more spindly than other stone fruit trees. They are pruned to a vase shape and have lots of upright shoots at the tree's center. Some plums trees have a pollinator limb — a single shoot that grows a few feet higher than other branches.



▲ Apricot

■ **Blossoms:** Five white or pink petals surround the bud center. Clusters appear on all parts of short spurs off lateral branches.

■ **Blossoms appear:** In late February.

■ **The tree:** Apricot trees are vase-shaped with branches that aren't as upright or as dense as the almond's.



▼ Baby blue eyes

■ **Flowers:** In March and April.

■ **Characteristics:** This sky-blue flower is an annual native to the West that grows 6 to 10 inches tall and branches from the base. Leaves have rounded lobes. Dainty, cup-shaped flowers are about 1 inch across.

