

## Blossom Time Fruit & Nut Identification Guide

Merced County is a great place to take pictures of agriculture. With a little practice you can identify the fruit and nut crops grown in our area.

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 are common on the Westside but 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. Peaches are common in Merced County but nectarines are rarely found here.

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. There are very few plums in Merced County.

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

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. Walnuts can be found all around Merced County

Pistachios are found in the southern portion of Merced County as you get near Chowchilla and also along the Westside. They look a little like a small walnut tree but are planted closer together and the leaves are different.

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, crown 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.

Kiwifruit (a few in north Merced County) will resemble grapes because they are a vine. They will be trained on a trellis that is about six feet tall.

A few blueberry fields can be found in North Merced County on very sandy soils.

There are no commercial apple or pear orchards in Merced. We have only a couple Asian pear blocks.