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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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VEGETATION THROUGH THE WINTER

In the north, mild winters are likely to cause more damage to vegetation than severe ones, though both have their dangers. Warm weather in winter does no harm unless it starts dormant buds swelling prematurely. In late winter, a period of warm rains is particularly destructive if followed by a cold spell with high winds, bright sunshine and no snow cover. Water from outside gets between the bud scales of a plant, and a later freezing and expanding will tear the frail parts to pieces. Moreover, after a warm rain the overground parts of plants become gorged with water which has been absorbed. A sudden freezing of this sap is likely to burst the delicate tissues of the plants from within.

In cold winters a snow cover usually protects plants from dryness and from sudden temperature changes. But sometimes the soil lacks a mulch or snow cover and becomes very deeply frozen. Then plants such as rhododendrons, which are constantly giving off a good deal of moisture, can obtain no water from the soil and will dry up and turn brown if exposed to bright sunlight and high winds. Low temperatures in winter will kill dormant peach buds and in the south unusually cold weather injures truck crops and stored vegetables.

(Tomorrow: A Year of Snow, A Year of Plenty)

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