

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

FROST IN THE ORCHARD

The fruit-growers of the United States pay heavy tribute every year to Jack Frost. The apple crop, alone, is damaged annually to the extent of forty million dollars, on an average, by his icy breath, and the citrus crops of Florida and California have, in some years, been almost wiped out by his visitations.

Yet Jack has a worse reputation than he deserves and is often accused of mischievous deeds when, in his blundering way, he is doing good. This happens almost every spring, when such trees as apples, pears, plums and cherries are in bloom. A frost plays havoc with the blossoms, and we hear that the crop is ruined. The following autumn, however, we have more fruit than we should have had if the frost had not occurred. This is because every fruit tree produces a great superabundance of blossoms. They do not all open at the same time, and, when open, are unequally exposed to the effects of frost on account of their different locations on the tree; hence a large proportion of them may be destroyed without curtailing the crop. Moreover, without the pruning action of frost, too many blossoms tend to set fruit and the vitality of the tree is exhausted. Orchardists tell us that from 75 to 90 per cent. of the blossoms should be destroyed by frost to give the best results.

The frosts that do harm are, as a rule, those that occur after the period of full bloom is over, and the later the frost the greater the damage.

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SCIENCE SERVICE,
21st and B Sts.,
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