

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHEN DOES SPRING BEGIN?

There are several answers to the question propounded above.

According to common opinion in the United States and Canada the first day of March is the beginning of spring, while in Great Britain February is popularly regarded as the first spring month. Meteorologists on both sides of the ocean accept the American idea and date spring from the first of March. Astronomers tell us that spring begins at the vernal equinox: March 21, or thereabouts. In many almanacs you will find opposite the equinoctial date: "Sun enters Aries; spring begins."

There is, however, another method of delimiting the vernal season that has much to recommend it from a practical point of view. The "spring of the year" is the time when vegetation springs into renewed life after the dormant period of winter. The process occurs earlier, on an average, in some places than in others, and in any one locality it occurs earlier in some years than in others. Among European phenologists it has become customary to regard as the "beginning of spring" the mean blossoming date of several common spring-flowering plants. In Germany 13 species of shrubs and trees are included in this group, and their average blossoming date coincides with that of the earlier varieties of apple.

Charts have been published showing, for some parts of Europe, the normal date of the beginning of spring in this sense of the term -- or, as it is sometimes called, the "spring date" -- which varies widely with latitude, altitude, distance from the ocean, etc. As a guide in agricultural undertakings such charts are probably more instructive than ordinary climatic charts, showing the normal distribution of temperature, rainfall and the like.

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