

Frost Protection

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Q. My fruit trees burst into bloom in the stretch of midwinter warm weather. How can I protect them from frost when cooler weather returns?

A. This is a common problem for those of us who grow fruit trees in the Redding area. In the north state, we can get killing frosts well into April in the valley and even later in the mountains and surrounding foothills. There are several things you can try depending on the number of trees you have, their location, and the severity of the frost. You can build tripods of light lumber or PVC pipe around trees and cover them with frost cloth or tarps. Another option is to hang the trees with the old-fashioned Christmas lights, although note that the newer LED Christmas-tree lights won't work, since they're cool burning and won't give off sufficient heat. You can turn a sprinkler on your trees just when the freeze begins, to coat them with ice; although it seems counterintuitive, the ice will protect the tree because the temperature beneath the ice will not drop below 32 degrees. For this method to work you will need to keep the sprinkler on until the temperatures rise above freezing, which is challenging in the times of drought restrictions. Some of the big orchards use fans to create air turbulence but I do not like to recommend use of the fan for residential yards as you can move cold air into someone else's yard and cause damage that could create a bad situation.