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Eating Out: Stop for a bite along the Blossom Trail

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The Fresno County Blossom Trail is in full bloom. The flowers on the peach, plum, nectarine and almond trees make for great photos, but they won't feed you just yet, so let's talk about where you can eat.

First, you can get a map and more info about the blossoms you're looking at at www.gofresnocounty.com. This column is not a comprehensive list of restaurants, so if someplace you like isn't on here, go online and share it in the comments section.

Sanger

Let's start with the obvious, the Blossom Trail Cafe, at 922 N. Academy Ave. at Belmont Avenue in Sanger.

Right now, the cafe is open for breakfast and lunch and it's often packed with farmers, tourists, cyclists and — as one fan told me, biker mamas (and presumably biker papas, too).

The menu has just about everything on it, says John Napoli, the Italian owner who tested me on the pronunciation of his name during our phone interview (emphasis on the first syllable).

"We do the standard American deal, plus a lot of Mexican, some Asian, some Italian," he says. "We have so much, we have a 14-15 page menu."

I'm not sure if Napoli was joking or not when he said he hadn't tasted everything on his menu.

Clam chowder is served seven days a week and he recommends the burgers.

"People go crazy for the burgers," he says.

The Blossom Trail Cafe is open from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday and until 2:30 p.m. on weekends. You can find more details on their Facebook page.

Another Sanger favorite is the Chuck Wagon at 1203 Academy Ave. If you're looking for a nice sit-down experience with white tablecloths, this isn't it. This is a little brick building with a walk-up window — outdoor seating only — selling hot dogs, burgers and burritos. It's the chili dogs that folks always talk about, though.

"We went there with Huell Howser and he loved it," Fresno County's tourism manager Kristi Johnson said of the "California Gold" host's visit to the area.

It's open 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday through Tuesday.

If you're looking for something a little more upscale, the School House Restaurant & Tavern is an option. The restaurant at Highway 180 and Frankwood Avenue — formerly the Sherwood Inn restaurant — is scheduled to have opened its patio for regular lunch service by the time this publishes.

The fire lounge patio has a view of the foothills and nearby orchards, two fire pits, a fountain and a "living wall" that will soon hold herbs used in the restaurant's dishes.

You can get lunch on the patio from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday. You can still eat after 3 p.m., but you'll be picking from the tavern menu's salads, pizza and appetizers if it's before 5 p.m. dinner service.

Reedley

Whether you head east or west from Sanger, the blossom trail eventually will take you to Reedley. One old stand-by with a new twist is The Bear Club at 1695 E. Manning Ave. Formerly Jon's Bear Club, the restaurant was sold to new owners last month.

The restaurant is launching a new lunch menu. It will still have all the old favorites, but the new owners are adding more burgers and sandwiches, including a patty melt and a Reuben sandwich.

Juan Reyes, son of the new owner, says the made-to-order grizzly burger is especially popular. It's a cheeseburger with a chef's special sauce.

Uncle Harry's restaurant is another Reedley classic. Not to be confused with Uncle Harry's bagelry in Fresno, this place is at 1201 G. St. in Reedley.

It's Armenian cuisine and you'll find lots of regulars and characters, including owner Harry Horasanian. He's 78, but he's always there, from the 11 a.m. opening to 9 p.m. closing. The restaurant is closed on Sundays.

Head waitress Diane Duran recommends newcomers try the lamb shish kebab. It's Harry's mom's recipe and is very popular. The restaurant also has specials during the blossom trail, including stuffed peppers and stuffed grape leaves.

Outlying cities

A few other cities aren't on the actual blossom trail, but close enough to make the drive for a meal. In Kingsburg, Diane's Village Bakery & Cafe offers something a little different than the more traditional restaurants in the Valley.

"My husband would call it more girlie food, but specialty salads and soups and sandwiches" are on the menu, says owner Diane Jacobson Hurtado.

It's a bakery, so you'll find pies and pastries, too. And it's Kingsburg, so the city's Swedish heritage shows up on the menu in the form of Swedish pancakes, which are thinner and more crepe-like than buttermilk pancakes. You also can get aebleskivers here, the little golfball-shaped Danish pancakes made with cardamom and served with raspberry preserves. (And before you tell me I spelled "aebleskivers" wrong, know that this is the spelling on Diane's menu. There are about five ways to spell the name of this regional treat and none of them appear in official sources.)

Diane's is open for breakfast and lunch from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., until 2 p.m. on Saturday and is closed on Sunday.

--The Dala Horse restaurant at 1531 Draper St. also serves Swedish food, including Swedish pancakes. It's open for breakfast and lunch.

--In Selma, Sal's Mexican Restaurant at 2163 Park St. is a popular choice. It serves all the traditional Mexican dishes and was the first of the Bobby Salazar's chain of restaurants. The fancy burrito, which comes with either chile verde or chile con carne, is often recommended here.

--In Fowler, Elaine's in 18 E Merced St. is often mentioned as a place to eat. The little cafe serves Chinese food and burgers.

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