

## Cold snaps nip Md. fruit in bud

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Sub-zero temperatures on Jan. 19 killed many fruiting buds on peach trees throughout western Maryland, and a below-freezing cold snap on the nights of April 8 and 9 ripped some of the early-blooming peaches in southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore.

The pre-Easter cold front also wiped out most of the apricot and sweet cherry crop in home gardens in central Maryland. And it may also have hit hard on gooseberries and other early-blooming bush fruits.

But the over-all effect of the double-barreled cold-weather shock was probably more beneficial than harmful for central Maryland peach growers, noted Christopher S. Walsh, Extension fruits specialist and assistant professor of horticulture at the University of Maryland in College Park.

Walsh explained that "even with 30 to 50 percent of the flower buds killed, you can still have a good peach crop. In fact, the cold weather this winter and spring will save commercial growers some

expense of bud thinning."

He notes that—next to apples—peaches are by far the most important tree fruit crop in Maryland. They are also much more susceptible to cold weather damage than apples are.

Heaviest peach damage this past winter occurred on weaker trees and those in exposed locations, the Maryland Extension specialist reported. The extreme cold temperatures also caused some trunk splitting.

Blake and Loring trees, the least hardy peach varieties, suffered

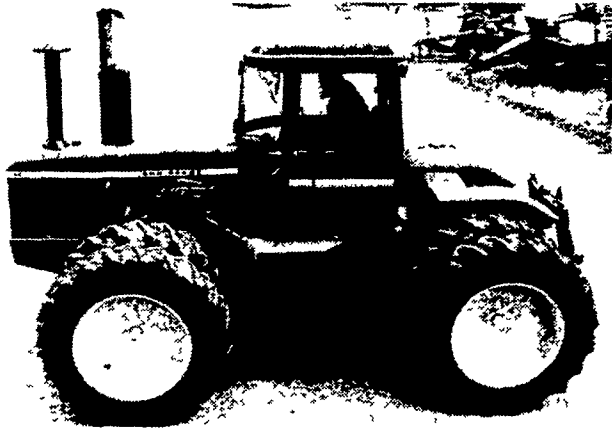
almost total fruit bud kill this past winter in the western panhandle of the state, where most of the commercial orchards are located. Early-blooming peaches probably were hit hardest by the early April cold weather on the Eastern Shore. Other than peaches and apricots, Walsh said there appears to have

been little cold-weather damage to fruit trees and small fruits this year in Maryland. Possible exceptions might be isolated instances of damage to thornless blackberries and to early bloomers like gooseberries and certain cherry varieties.

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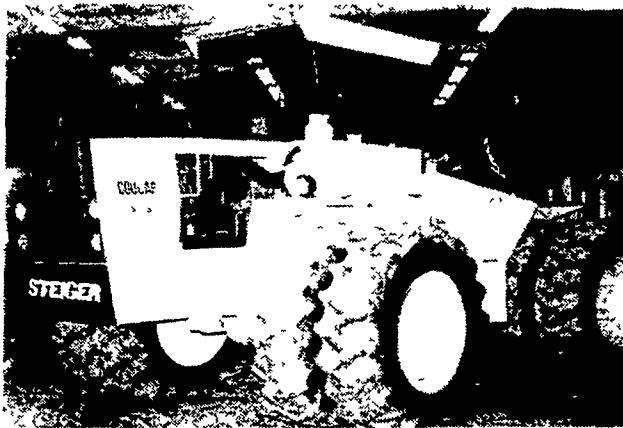
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