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Winter drops by this week, but it will feel more like spring by Friday

By Jennifer Crossley Howard

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ANDERSON — Only five days ago highs topped the 60s, but outdoor thermometers will read freezing temperatures during a winter interlude this week.

Winds of up to 13 mph will make days feel about 10 degrees colder, said Bryan McAvoy, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service.

Today's low drops to 28 degrees, and the high reaches 47. Thursday peaks at 56 and falls to 29. The week is clear and cold until the weekend when a chance for rain develops. Highs hit the 60s by Friday, and there's a 50 percent chance of rain Saturday.

Such fickle patterns interrupted by cold bursts are characteristic of January, McAvoy said. He expects the pattern to last at least two more months.

In contrast, December was so mild that blooms normally reserved for spring opened early. Azaleas and camellias were some of the plants flowering prematurely, said Howard Stone, co-owner of Spring Hill Growers in Williamston. The evergreen shrubs are typically hardy during winter, but flop-flopping weather can harm them, Stone said.

If the plants still have healthy buds they will probably bloom in the spring, too, he said.

"It's not a total loss, but it will affect the total number of blooms," he said.

In Charlotte, N.C., some cherry trees were reported to be in bloom.

"I haven't spotted any of those, but it wouldn't surprise me," Stone said.

He has noticed several perennials such as lantana and other butterfly plants flowering.

If they aren't dead already, freezing temperatures will kill them, Stone said.

A chance of rain on Saturday night comes from the Gulf of Mexico, McAvoy said. Showers will hit the Deep South before reaching the Upstate.

"It's not a deep system, but it's enough to bring some rain to the area," McAvoy said.

There was adequate rain in December to change predictions that Hartwell Lake would drop to 646 feet by mid-January, said Billy Birdwell, spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The lake stood 652.18 feet above sea level Tuesday, and is projected to drop no lower than 650 feet through March, he said. Lake Jocassee stood 24 feet below full pool level Tuesday, and Lake Keowee stood 4 feet below full pool level.