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## **Growing Peach Trees**

### **Site Selection, Soil Preparation, and Planting**

Peaches or nectarines require full sunlight and should not receive shade from buildings or tall trees. If possible, select a site with a high elevation so that cold air can drain away from the tree on a cold night during bloom. The best site will have well drained sandy loam type soil. Peach or nectarine tree roots or rootstocks will not tolerate soils where water remains on or near the surface for more than one hour after a heavy rain.

Plant your tree in the spring in the center of your prepared area. Keep the bud union 1 inch above the soil. Planting a peach or nectarine tree too deep in the soil can cause poor growth or death.

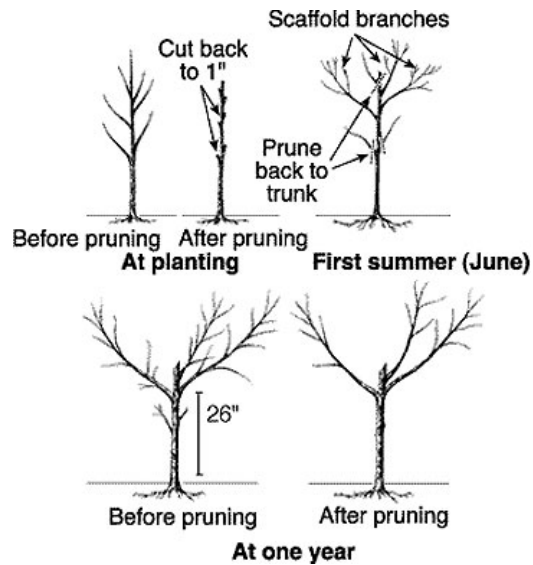
### **Training and Pruning**

The open center system is recommended for peach and nectarine trees for maximum sunlight exposure, maximum yield, and best quality. All pruning should be done in the winter when the tree is dormant. Pruning and training should be done in the year of planting and every year after to develop a strong, well balanced framework of scaffolds (a tree with a strong trunk and well positioned side branches); and to maintain the balance between vegetative growth and fruit production.

During the first year, remove diseased, broken, and low-hanging limbs. Then remove vigorous upright shoots that may have developed on the inside of the main scaffolds and if left could shade the center.

During the second and third years, remove low-hanging, broken, and/or diseased limbs. To maintain the open vase, remove any vigorous upright shoots developing on the inside of the tree, leaving the smaller shoots for fruit production. Finally, prune the vigorous upright limbs on the scaffolds by cutting them back to an outward growing shoot.

The principles used to develop the trees are used to annually maintain the size and shape of the mature tree. Remove low-hanging, broken, and dead limbs first. Next, remove the vigorous upright shoots or suckers along the scaffolds. Lower the tree to the desired height by pruning the scaffolds to an outward growing shoot at the desired height.



### **Increase Fruit Size Through Thinning**

In years without frost and freeze damage, more peaches will set than the tree can support and fruit must be thinned. Approximately three to four weeks after bloom or when the largest fruit are as large as a quarter, fruits should be removed by hand so that the remaining peaches are spaced about every 8 inches. Fruit thinning will allow the remaining fruits to develop optimum size, shape, and color, and prevent depletion of the tree.

### **Fertilizer**

Apply 1/2 pound of 10-10-10 fertilizer or its equivalent 7 to 10 days after planting and the same amount again 40 days after planting. Broadcast the fertilizer evenly, 8 to 12 inches away from the trunk. In the second and third years after planting, the tree should receive 3/4 pound of 10-10-10 in March and again in May. Mature peach trees (4 to 10 years of age) should receive 1 to 2 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer each in March and May. If the tree is vigorous and there are no fruit expected, only the March application is necessary. Broadcast the fertilizer around the outer edge of the tree keeping the trunk area free of fertilizer.

Peach trees need to grow 18 inches of new growth each year. Remove the sod from under the tree, mulch and/or irrigate as needed. Irrigation will increase yield particularly if it is applied three weeks before harvest.

### **Insect and disease control**

**VERY IMPORTANT** – always read chemical labels and follow manufacturers directions carefully to avoid injury to your tree, the environment or yourself.

Peach trees are highly susceptible to disease and insect infestations, so spraying is extremely important. Many fruit trees die from pests that could have been controlled with proper spraying.

To control Peach Leaf Curl, peach trees should be sprayed with Copper Fungicide in the dormant season (early spring) before leaf buds open. Always follow manufacturers directions. Use ¼ to ½ gal. per tree. Peach Leaf Curl mainly affects young trees, as the tree matures, the disease disappears. A heavy infestation can kill a young tree. If Peach Leaf Curl is not present, do not spray at this time.

To control Brown Rot, spray with Daconil or Fung-onil just before blooms open and when blooms are 90% open. These products are fungicides and will not harm pollinating bees.

To control fruit flies, mites, worms, scab and brown rot, spray with Fruit Tree Spray.

1. When petals have fallen.
2. 7 days later.
3. Every 10-14 days after that. Stop 1 week before harvest (early Aug.).

Never spray pesticides when trees are in bloom as this will kill the pollinating honeybees.

Always spray when the temperature is above freezing and there is no wind. Early in the morning is best.

Good sanitation practices are necessary to control pest problems. Cut out all dead or diseased wood and disinfect pruning tools with a household disinfectant (Lysol or bleach). Pick up all fruit that has fallen to reduce insects.

## FRESH PEACHES

**When Picking**, handle fruit carefully because peaches bruise very easily and decay develops rapidly.

**When Selecting**, look for peaches with a creamy to gold undercolor that best indicates ripeness. The amount of red blush on fruit depends on the variety and is not always a sign of ripeness. Two other indicators of ripeness are a well-defined crease and a good fragrance. Select fruit that has begun to soften for immediate use. Firm, ripe fruit can be held a few days at room temperature to ripen further. Never pick peaches with a green undercolor since they will not ripen well. They will shrivel, become flabby and never achieve a good flavor.

**When Storing**, peaches should be held at 32-35°F in high humidity. Fully ripened peaches should be refrigerated immediately and kept there until ready for consumption. Sound and mature, but not overripe, peaches can be expected to hold 1-2 weeks at 32-35° F with little adverse effects. Peaches deteriorate rapidly when stored for longer periods.

**When Ripening**, a room temperature of 65-70°F is best for mature peaches. There is no gain in sugar content once a peach is picked from a tree. Its ripening process consists primarily of softening, developing juiciness, and developing flavor. So the riper a peach is at harvest, the more sugar it will contain. Remember, once a mature peach begins to ripen, it never stops; but you can slow the rate of ripening by storing it in low temperatures.

**When Preparing**, wash peaches gently, peel, and remove pits. Handle carefully to avoid bruising. To peel a peach, dip it in boiling water for 30 seconds, then in cold water. The peel should slide off easily. To keep sliced peaches from darkening, dip in lemon juice or ascorbic acid.