

Peaches

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.

Prepare the soil one to two years before planting so that soil pH, organic matter, and nutrient status can be modified for the production of high quality peaches and/or nectarines. Prepare a bed at least 5 to 6 feet in diameter by cultivating (spading) 10 to 12 inches deep and adding organic matter such as manure, leaves, grass clippings, and compost. Take a soil sample, have the soil tested by your local Extension office, and add the recommended lime and fertilizer. For best results, sample soils 6 to 8 inches deep every two to three years.

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.



Figure 1

Training and Pruning

The open center system is recommended for peach and nectarine trees for maximum sunlight exposure, maximum yield, and best quality (Figure 1). 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.

Immediately after planting, prune the tree back to a height of 26 to 30 inches. Cut off all side branches to leave a whip (a shoot without lateral branches or with lateral branches removed) that is 26 to 30 inches tall. This sounds drastic; however, the best- shaped open center trees come from those pruned initially to a whip.

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 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.