

Peaches



Peaches are surely one of everyone's favorite fruits. Sweet and juicy, they are great fresh and make wonderful preserves and compotes. Peaches, however, are not one of nature's inventions but rather have been carefully developed by man over a long period. As such, there is little "natural" about growing them and they do require a great deal of care; they are also subject to cotton root rot, post-oak root rot (soil conditions almost impossible to overcome), and brown rot. Most home fruit lovers would say that the time and effort is well worth the while.

Peaches are grafted plants, which means that the wood from one variety of tree is imbedded on the roots of another variety of peach tree to produce a sort of "combined" tree: hardy root stock but different, fruit-producing wood above. When you buy a variety of peach, the upper part of the tree you see is rather like a clone - it is genetically identical to all the other trees that are called by the same variety name. If you see sprouts growing below the graft line, they are sprouts from the root stock tree and you should prune them off.

Remember that fruit is largely composed of water - peaches require a great deal of water when fruiting. And peach trees are so productive that they will make more fruit than they can really carry: the limbs will be overladen with fruit to the breaking point. This condition, called "over-cropping," will result in much smaller fruit and can so wear down your tree that it will do poorly the following season and may take several seasons to recover. Cull about half your peaches early in the development process, spacing about six to eight inches apart. Be prepared

to have a lot of competition for your fruit: insects (cat facing insects, peach twig borer plum curculio, etc.) and wildlife will help themselves.

Peaches need to be cold for a certain number of hours in the winter to stimulate their growth hormones to produce blossoms and fruit in the spring. The number of hours they need to be cold is called chill hours and you will see all peaches listed with their required chill hours. Planting peaches that require more cold than you normally expect to have in your area will result in a low to no crop in the spring. Similarly, planting peaches that require many fewer hours than is common to your area may result in early blossoms that may be frost damaged. Stay with peaches that require the appropriate number of chill hours for your area.

Peaches are self-fruitful which means that they do not require another variety of peach to pollinate them. Pollination is accomplished by the wind.

Peaches come in two varieties, free stone (where the pit or stone in the middle comes easily from the ripe fruit) and cling stone (where the flesh of the peach will cling to the stone and is hard to remove.) We recommend two varieties for this area, both free stone:

LaFeliciana. We have found no peach that performs better in the Gonzales area than LaFeliciana. A lovely free stone with yellow flesh, it is originally from Louisiana and is adapted to the warmer areas like Gonzales. It is highly flavorful, juicy and sweet and ripens in June. It requires 550 chill hours which is ideal for this area. Mid-season harvest dates. Heavy-bearing, high quality.

Tex Prince. Tex Prince is a free stone variety and a consistent producer in this area. It typically ripens in June. It has rich yellow flesh and requires 500 to 550 chill hours.

Peach trees normally are a smaller tree and they can be every ornamental. They reach a height of about 20 feet and a spread of 10 to 15 feet. The flowers, borne in the spring, are a lovely pink (see photo at right) and the foliage is strappy and dark green. Think about including one in your landscape as an ornamental with a big bonus—great fruit!