

Starting Right with Peaches

Site Selection and Planting

- Choose a site that is in full sun, with well- drained soil. If the soil is heavy or poorly drained, build a raised mound
- 3'-4' in diameter, 8"-10" high.
- Peaches are best grown where there is a low chance of late frosts.
- Keep grass and weeds away from the tree to reduce competition. A very thin mulch can be used to keep weeds down.
- Irrigate thoroughly during the summer months, watering infrequently but deeply. It is especially important to water adequately while the fruit is approaching ripeness.



Management:

Remember the goal in the home orchard is to keep the trees healthy and productive.

- Because peaches are subject to some diseases, it is important to apply preventative sprays before problems exist. The two main diseases that cause problems in our climate are Peach Leaf Curl and Bacterial Canker. Both are easily controlled by timed sprays that have copper or sulfur as an ingredient.
- At bud swell (usually mid-January), spray sulfur, copper sulfate, fixed copper, or Bordeaux with a spreader sticker. Spray again 3 weeks later, and a third spray should be applied 3 weeks after that. This spray will control leaf infection of Peach Leaf Curl. Resistant varieties such as Frost Peach may need spraying when young, but develop resistance as they become established.
- As the trees lose their leaves in fall, apply a spray of copper with a sticker-spreader. This spray helps prevent bacterial canker infections.
- During the spring and summer months, watch for aphids, and control with horticultural soap or a strong jet of water.

Pruning:

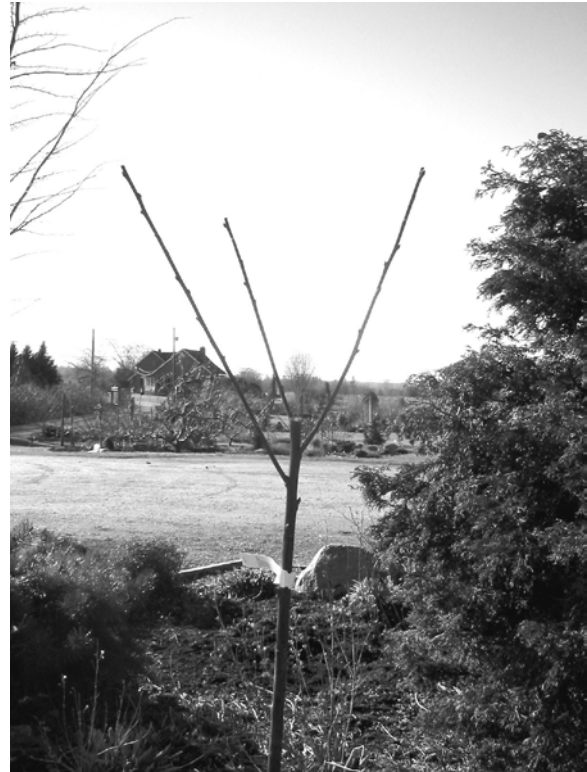
Peaches are pruned differently than all other fruit trees! The goal of pruning peaches is to create lots of young "brush" or branches. These trees bear mainly on new wood; without annual hard pruning, they will not produce well. Pruning should be done during dry weather (48 hours of no rain after cuts are made) at or just after bloom in spring.

- At planting, choose 3 evenly spaced branches to form the main trunks, or leaders. Remove all other branches, and cut the trunks back to 12"-18"
- Each year, these trunks will be headed back to stimulate branching.
- The branches that grow from the trunks should be pruned each year to promote fruit quality.
- Branches that have mostly pointed buds (leaf buds) should be pruned back to 2-4 buds to produce branches for next year.

- The branches that have round buds (flower/fruit buds) on the lower section of the branch should be pruned back to 4"-6". Thin the branch stubs that have fruit bud so the developing fruit will not be crowded.



Young Peach before pruning.



Same peach after pruning back to 3 main trunks or leaders.

Managing Fruit

- In a good year, an established peach tree can set too many peaches. Some thinning of the fruit will be done by pruning, but further reducing the number of peaches on the tree will give you larger and higher quality of fruit. It is especially important to thin fruit that is crowding- fruit that is touching other fruit is more subject to brown rot. Always remove fruit at the end of branches to keep the branch from distorting.
- Keep the trees irrigated. Lack of water will stress the tree and can also lead to small fruit. Keeping the ground free of grass and weeds below the tree can help conserve moisture.
- Harvest the fruit when it has changed color (background color no longer green), fragrant, but still hard. Allowing the fruit to soften on the tree leads to mealy or stringy texture. Allow the fruit to ripen off the tree at room temperature, or store in the refrigerator.