

Peaches/Nectarines Info Sheet

Prunus persica

The peach gets its botanical species name, *persica*, from the long-mistaken belief that it originated in Persia. In fact, trade along the old silk routes over two thousand years ago brought the fruit to Persia (modern day Iran) from China, where it had already been cultivated for two thousand years before that. From Persia, it spread to ancient Greece and Rome. In the 16th century the Spanish planted peaches in the Americas; in the 17th century they finally reached France and England, from where they were brought to North America and planted in Virginia. Various American Indian groups are then credited with planting peach seeds across the United States.

Today, peach trees are the second most commonly cultivated fruit trees in the world after apple trees. In the U.S., peaches are the fourth largest commercial non-citrus fruit crop, surpassed only by grapes, apples and strawberries. California, South Carolina and Georgia are the top growers in the U.S., but peaches are grown successfully in 26 other states as well, including Florida.

Like the plum and the apricot, the peach is a member of the Rose family (Rosaceae) and distinguished by its velvety skin. It is classified as a *drupe*, a fruit with a hard stone. Cultivated peaches are divided into clingstones and freestones, depending on whether the flesh sticks to the stone or not; most central Florida peaches are classified as “semi-clingstone”.

Although the nectarine is the same species as the peach, it is treated as a separate fruit only because it has a smooth skin. The difference is actually genetic: fuzzy skin is a dominant gene trait; smooth skin is due to a recessive gene. Thus, peach trees sometimes spontaneously produce nectarines and vice versa.

The fact that peaches and nectarines can be grown at all in central Florida is mostly thanks to the continuing efforts of researchers at the University of Florida in the development of trees that do not require the higher amounts of accumulated chilling hours that traditional peaches require to produce high quality fruit. The minimum amount of accumulated cool temperature exposure needed for normal growth, which varies by cultivar (variety), is referred to as the “chilling requirement” (number of hours below 45°F or 7°C). All of the peaches offered by Rockledge Gardens have a low chilling requirement (300 hours or less), but residents in the southern part of Brevard County should not choose varieties that require more than 200 chilling hours.

Description

Peaches and nectarines are both deciduous trees that grow rapidly to 20 feet tall or more and about as wide. Properly pruned however, they can be maintained at 12 to 15 feet. Trees start bearing fruit at 3 to 4 years old, reaching a peak at about 12 years. All of the peaches and nectarines sold here are self-fertile. Depending on variety, fruit ripens somewhere between April and June.

Trees prefer full to partial sun (at least 6 hours a day), regular irrigation, and tolerate most soil types, as long as they are well-drained and slightly acidic. They have no salt tolerance.

Planting Instructions

Prepare the soil by adding 1 part organic matter—such as our **Rockledge Gardens Planting Mix**—to 1 to 2 parts existing soil (use more Planting Mix in sandier soil). Use this mix to backfill the hole. Add a few cups of both **Espoma Citrus-Tone** and some **Bio-Tone Starter Plus** when planting. Work these into the soil alongside of the rootball while planting and sprinkle some on the surface. Reapply Citrus-Tone around the tree



surface every 2 months. These organic products will serve to stimulate root growth for quicker establishment.

The planting hole should be wider—but no deeper—than the rootball. When planted, the tree should be no lower in the ground than it was in the pot. If higher (recommended for poor draining areas), it should be bermed up gradually.

When removing the tree from the container, use care: do this right next to the hole you have just prepared. Examine the tree roots closely for injury. If any of the roots are crushed or broken, cut them at a point just inside of the injury. If there are roots encircling more than one-third of the root ball, cut these by making 3 vertical cuts spaced equally around the rootball. This will not harm the tree if it is properly watered. Prune any broken branches just beyond the branch collar. Before planting, scrape a small amount of soil and root hairs away from the sides of the tree. If some of the dirt should fall off of the rootball, don't panic! Carefully place the tree into the hole and backfill with your mixture.

Gently place the tree into the hole, again checking that the soil at the top of the rootball is level with the soil in your yard. Fill in the sides of the hole around the rootball and gently firm the soil mixture around the base of the tree.

Rockledge Gardens



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Eliminate air pockets by using a gentle stream of water from a hose. Form a ridge or berm of soil 2 to 3 inches high around the margin of the hole to serve as a reservoir when watering. This berm should have a diameter a little wider than the pot the tree was growing in.

Watering

When temperatures are hot, water your tree by hand daily for the first two weeks by filling the water reservoir (or use two gallons of water per inch of trunk diameter). In cooler weather, water every other day (in cold weather, water even less frequently). Weeks 3 and 4, water every other day (twice a week in cooler weather). Continue reducing in two-week stages until you're applying water only once per week.

During the dry season and periods of drought, you should supply even mature trees with an inch of water weekly in warm weather (every two weeks in cooler weather).

Fertilizing

A month after planting, begin feeding with **Citrus-Tone** or **Sunniland Citrus Fertilizer**. Start with no more than 1/4 pound at monthly or bi-monthly intervals, increasing the rates in line with plant growth (see bag instructions). Starting with the second year in the ground, fertilize with amounts

following bag instructions in late February, June and September. We also strongly recommend spraying often with **Maxicrop Liquid Seaweed**, especially in February and November, to boost the immune system of the tree.

Pruning

Although each tree will grow differently with few trees being perfectly symmetrical, the overall goal for peaches and nectarines is to develop an open center or vase-shaped tree with a spreading but upright growth habit. Maintaining an open center in this way will allow light penetration throughout the canopy to stimulate production of new fruiting wood, improve tree vigor and fruit quality and enable you to pick fruit without a ladder. During the first spring and summer, trees should be managed to produce as much vegetative growth as possible, with major pruning left to the winter months when the trees are dormant. However, new plantings can be pruned lightly during the summer without reducing leaf surface area much.

During the second and third years, young trees are trained to develop a branching system or tree canopy that will later support a well-distributed crop. Mature, producing trees from about three to ten years of age are usually pruned when dormant (December to February) and during the late spring and summer (May to August).

Peach Varieties

Flordabelle (200 chilling hours): High-yielding tree, big semi-clingstone fruit, red-skinned with golden-yellow flesh. Fruit averages 2½ to 3 inches in diameter. Ripens early to mid-May.

Flordaglo (150 chilling hours): Large semi-clingstone fruit for its season; firm, red-skinned with non-browning white flesh. Ripens in late April to early May, about 78-80 days after blooming.

Flordaprince (150 chilling hours): Medium-size firm semi-clingstone fruit, yellow flesh with mostly red blush. Ripens in late April to early May, 78-83 days after full bloom. Most widely planted low-chill peach in the world.

Flordawon (200 chilling hours): Medium-size firm semi-clingstone fruit, white flesh with a red blush. Ripens late in the season in early June.

Tropic Beauty (150 chilling hours): Medium-size semi-freestone fruit, yellow melting flesh with a red blush. Ripens in mid-May, 85-94 days after full bloom.

Tropic Snow (200 chilling hours): Large, firm semi-freestone peach with sweet white flesh, excellent flavor and yellow to pink blush. Ripens in late May to early June, 110 days after full bloom.

Tropic Sweet (175 chilling hours): Large yellow-fleshed freestone with red-yellow blush. Ripens in May, 90-100 days after full bloom.

UF Beauty (150 chilling hours): Large yellow-fleshed freestone with red blush. Ripens in mid-May, 80 days after blooming.

UF Gold (200 chilling hours): High-yielding tree, big, firm semi-freestone with orange-yellow non-melting flesh and red blush. Firm texture gives this one a longer shelf life and delicious taste. Ripens in early May, 80 days after blooming.

UF Sun (150 chilling hours): Ultra-low chill, non-melting semi-clingstone peach. Sweet yellow flesh with red over bright yellow skin. Ripens in late April to early May, 80 days after blooming. Sweetens longer on the tree.

Nectarine Varieties

Sunhome (250 chilling hours): A yellow flesh, semi-freestone nectarine with beautiful dark red foliage in the early spring and a beautiful ornamental pink bloom.

Sunraycer (250 chilling hours): Large semi-freestone with yellow flesh. Ripens in mid-May.

UFQueen (250 chilling hours): New and distinct variety with yellow, non-melting flesh with red skin. Ripens in early to mid-May or about 95 days after full bloom.