

Peaches

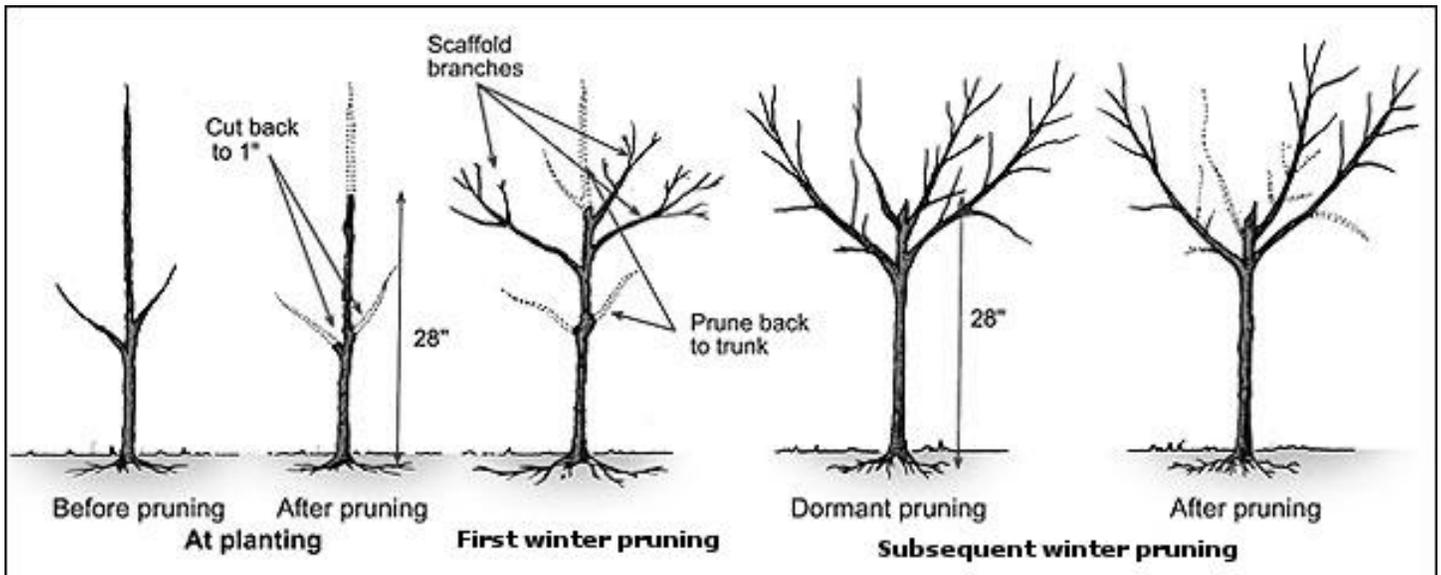
Peaches are among the most challenging and rewarding fruits to grow. They are self-fertile and do not require a second variety for pollination, but they do require a fixed number of chill hours to set fruit. Considering the unpredictability of Texas weather, it may increase your chances of harvest by having two trees with different ranges for chill hours. For example, consider that your area *averages* 600 chill hours. Planting a tree that needs 450-500 chill hours and one that needs 600-700 hours increases the chance of successful fruit set even with unpredictable winter weather.

In a commercial orchard, optimal tree health will give an 18 foot wide canopy, and the trees will be spaced at that distance.¹ For the home grower, space limits and desire for other fruit trees in the same environment may take higher priority. It will be important to remember that close spacing of trees will create a demand for resources such as water and nutrients, and can increase disease and pest pressures. This should not discourage you from planting densely; it simply will require more attention to the trees to ensure they are getting what they need to be successful.

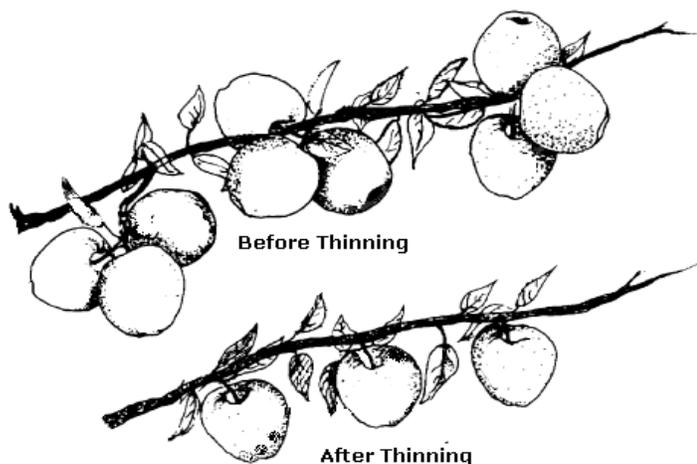
Dr. Larry Stein of Texas Cooperative Extension says “If you can get 15 years from a peach tree, you are doing well,” so it pays to prepare the soil correctly and pamper peach trees from the start. Consult our handout *Planting & Maintenance Guide for Fruits, Nuts, & Berries* for further instructions.

Prune peaches according to the **open center** method: **At Planting:** Cut main stem back to a height of 24” to 30”. Allow tree to grow freely the first year. **1st Winter:** In January to mid-February while the tree is dormant, select 3-4 evenly-spaced scaffold branches. Prune the tips of these to 24” from the trunk. Remove any growth arising on the scaffold branches within 6” of the trunk. All branches on the trunk above or below the scaffold branches should be removed. Remove all branches growing down, towards the center, vertically, or at narrow angles. **Subsequent Winters:** Long, slender branches should be headed back each winter to induce further branching. Continue removing branches growing down, towards the center, or at narrow angles. Consult a reputable, current book or university website for more complete pruning information.

It takes 4 years for a peach tree to mature and produce a significant harvest. Do not allow the tree to produce heavily before then – remove excess fruit. When the tree is of bearing age, before the peaches reach 1/2” in diameter, thin the fruit so that they are 6” apart. This is *essential* for the health of the tree. Proper thinning often removes 70-80% of the fruit. Neglecting to thin the fruit can break branches, reduce or eliminate the next season’s production, or even kill the tree.



¹ Texas Peach Handbook, Jim Kamas and Larry Stein.



Fruits should be 4 to 6 inches apart, with only one fruit left per cluster as in the lower example.

Clingstone or Freestone - Clingstone peaches are great for canning, pickling, and fresh eating, but not typically for freezing or cooking. Freestone varieties readily separate from the pit, making them much easier to clean for recipes. Peaches harvested later in the season are higher in natural sugars. Choose a variety with high to very high firmness for cooking. The firmer late season peaches tend to have higher pectin levels, useful in preparation of jams, jellies, and fruit preserves.

Peach Varieties for Central Texas (chilling hours/stone or pit adherence to flesh)

Dixieland (750/free) – Large fruit ripening mid-late July with juicy, yellow flesh, red-blushed skin, and great flavor.

FloridaCrest (350/semi-cling) – Small-medium fruit ripening mid-May with melting, yellow flesh and red-blushed skin.

FloridaKing (450/cling) – Large fruit ripening mid-May with firm, golden yellow, very sweet flesh and red-blushed skin.

Harvester (750/free) - Medium-large fruit ripening mid-late June with firm, finely-textured yellow flesh, acidic, excellent flavor and fiery red skin. Tree is resistant to bacterial leaf spot. Fruit tends to ripen uniformly.

June Gold (650/cling) – Large fruit ripening late May-early June with a melting texture yellow flesh and a heavy red blushed skin Great for canning.

La Feliciana (550-600/free) – Large fruit ripening late June-early July with a firm, yellow flesh with sweet tangy flavor, great texture and a red-blushed skin. Very heavy producer that is tolerant of bacteriosis.

Red Baron (250/free) – Large red and yellow skinned fruit with delicious flavor. This variety has double dark reddish-pink blooms in spring.

Redskin (750/free) – Large fruit ripening mid-July with firm, yellow flesh, great flavor, and solid red skin. Excellent fresh with good shipping and canning qualities. Resistant to bacteriosis.

TexKing (450/cling) – Large fruit ripening early to mid-May with firm, sweet, rich, slightly acidic yellow flesh and attractive yellow skin with red blush. Tree is moderately resistant to bacterial leaf spot.

TexPrince (550/free) – Large fruit ripening late May with tangy-sweet yellow flesh and attractive yellow-orange skin with red blush. Tree is moderately resistant to bacterial leaf spot.

Texstar (450/semi-free) - Medium fruit ripening late May-early June with firm and flavorful fruit and a yellow skin with slight blush.