Peach & Nectarine

Florida's mild winter climate and early spring season offer unique opportunities for early season peach and nectarine production. Currently, Florida produces some of the earliest commercial-quality peaches and nectarines in North America.

The northern production area extends from Madison County west, and the cultivars grown in this area require 400 to 650 hours of chilling. For the central area of the state, cultivars that require 150 to 275 hours of chilling have been developed. Chilling hours vary considerably from year to year. Cultivars with the appropriate chilling requirement are determined based on the amount of cold received during average winters in each area. Peaches are available May-September.

Fertilizing

Peaches and nectarines are generally fertilized with a 12-4-8 fertilizer which is broadcast under the canopy of the tree. Fertilizer with added micronutrients is recommended. Fertilizer amounts and application times vary based on the age of the tree:

**Year 1:** Newly planted trees should be fertilized in:
- February: 1/8 pound (1/4 cup) per tree of 12-4-8 fertilizer with micronutrients.
- May (late): 1/4 pound (1/2 cup) per tree of 12-4-8 fertilizer with micronutrients.
- July: 1/2 pound (1 cup) per tree of 12-4-8 fertilizer with micronutrients.

**Year 2+:** Fertilize in late January and again in May using 1 to 1.5 pounds (2-3 cups) per tree of 12-4-8 fertilizer with micronutrients.

Pruning

Peach and nectarine trees are trained into an open vase canopy. For instructions on training young trees go to: [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs365](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs365).

After the trees have been trained pruning to maintain the open center of the canopy should be done during the dormant season (January-February). This will allow for light penetration which will stimulate growth of new fruiting wood and improve fruit quality. Overall height of the tree canopy should be maintained at the desired level at this time as well. Lighter pruning for the same reasons can be accomplished during the summer after fruit is harvested (May-August).
Fruit Thinning

Thinning stone fruit is necessary to produce large, high quality fruit. Choosing not to thin your fruit can result in small, poor quality fruit and can even be detrimental to tree longevity. Peaches and nectarines should be thinned to one every 6 to 10 inches, before the pit hardening stage. If the fruit can be cut completely through the pit area, then pit hardening has not occurred. At this stage, the peach size is on the order of a marble or nickel. The fruit can be twisted off the stem and dropped to the orchard floor.

UF/IFAS Publications

Prunus persica: Peach

Alternative Opportunities for Small Farms: Peach and Nectarine Production Review

Florida Subtropical Peaches: Production Practices

Training and Pruning Florida Peaches, Nectarines and Plums

Peach, Plum, and Nectarine Pest Management

Weed Management in Stone Fruit Tree Crops (Nectarine, Peach, and Plum)

UF/IFAS Sites

Stone Fruit Production in Florida - UF Horticulture Sciences Department