

# JUST FRUITS

## AND EXOTICS

# PEACH, PLUM *and* NECTARINE

## INTRODUCTION

Peaches are the emblem of Southern summer, now joined by nectarines bred for the humid South. Plums were native here, and are a close relative of peaches and nectarines. If you want sweet, juicy peaches, plums or nectarines, take the time to grow your own—storebought ones are picked green and rarely resemble the real thing. The Louisiana State University program has been a great breeder of delicious and disease resistant varieties and both the University of Georgia and the University of Florida have released many great varieties. All peaches and nectarines are self fertile so plant one or fill your orchard! But, plums require cross pollination, so leave room for at least two trees.

## USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Each season provides its own kind of beauty with peaches, plums and nectarines. Spring brings billows of fragrant pink to red flowers like cotton candy clouds, followed by months of beautiful fruit changing from green to yellow, gold, peachy red or purple. In fall, leaves turn bright yellow. Standard-sized trees can be used as small shade trees or as part of a fruitful border. When full grown, the willowy trees are 12-18 feet tall. Mix peaches, plums and nectarines with smaller fruits such as blueberries, blackberries, figs and pomegranates. Group them along a pathway so you can enjoy them close up!

## PLANTING + CULTURE

### SITE SELECTION

Well-drained, sandy loam soils are preferred, but peaches, plums and nectarines will grow on many soil types if good drainage is provided. Peaches, plums and nectarines will grow more vigorously and produce more fruit in full sun. Avoid frost pockets – trees may be damaged by unseasonable frosts.

### SOIL PREPARATION + PLANTING

Peaches, plums and nectarines prefer slightly acid soil (pH 6.0 - 6.8). If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, take a soil sample to the Cooperative Extension Agent in your county for a soil test. Dig a planting hole approximately three times the width of the pot and at the same depth as the root ball. Set that soil aside and mix it 50/50 with either aged mushroom compost, aged manure, or rotted pine bark & aged manure/compost. Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball, cut any roots that swirl around the edges of the root ball, and place the tree in the planting hole. To avoid burying too deep, make sure plant is positioned with the top most roots at the soil line. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Do NOT put fertilizer in the planting hole. Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below). If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of mulch. In spring, we suggest a mix of compost and weed-free hay as mulch. Pull mulch a couple of inches away from the trunk for good air circulation. In summer, use weed-free hay or grass clippings alone. Spacing for peaches, plums and nectarines depends upon the desired use in the landscape, but in general trees should be at least 20 feet apart. Put plums approximately 20 feet apart for cross pollination. Refer to the Orchard Care Fact Sheet for details of peach, plum and nectarine care throughout the year.

## FERTILIZATION

Starter Fertilizer & Soil (Apply at Planting)	Fertilizer to Maintain (Apply Early March, Late May, & Late July)
Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus Mix Mushroom Compost in Soil	Espoma Citrus-tone®

Notes:

- Follow Instructions on Bag for how much to apply each time.
- Fertilizing Zones 8 and below: Months to Fertilize vary based on your zone. Fertilize 3 times per year. For Citrus in Zone 8 and below We recommend the 1<sup>st</sup> fertilization starting after the last Freeze of the winter (Late February/Early March in zones 8) & the last Fertilization being no later than August or even June/July in some of the colder zones 7 & below.)
- For Zones 9 and above: You may follow the Espoma Citrus-tone® Fact Sheet recommendations of; Late Winter January/February pre-bloom application to enhance flowering, Late Spring May/June Post-bloom application to encourage better fruit set, and Late Fall September/October application to ensure overall nutrient needs are met.
- Fertilizing too late in the year in colder climates will promote new growth, which will be subject to freeze damage.

Spread the fertilizer evenly under the entire canopy of the plant, avoiding a 6 inch area around the trunk. Water or rake in. If using Espoma fertilizer and you have sandy soil, be sure to also put a ½ inch layer of rotted pine bark or rotter leaves on top of fertilizer.

See our “Planting a Tree Correctly” Guide & Espoma Bio-tone® and Citrus-tone® Fact Sheets on our website for more info.

## WATER

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new peach, plum or nectarine tree. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils or once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply – this usually takes 40-50 minutes. Established trees should receive at least 1 inch of water each week. Water regularly, especially during dry periods. Fruit may drop prematurely if insufficiently irrigated during dry spells.

## ORCHARD CARE

Peaches, plums and nectarines need a little help to be productive. Check with your extension agent for specific recommendations for your area. White peach scale can be controlled by dormant oil sprays at leaf fall and bud break. This is highly recommended as an annual maintenance spray. Brown rot can be prevented by using a wettable sulphur spray every 2 weeks while fruit is ripening. Pack wood ashes around the base of your tree to fend off peach tree borers. Happy eating!

## PRUNING + THINNING

Peaches, plums and nectarines in the South are usually pruned to an open center habit. At planting select 3-4 scaffold branches spaced equally around the trunk and remove other branches flush with the trunk. In the second dormant season, top the scaffold limbs approximately 36 inches from the trunk to encourage secondary branching. Remove any strong branches growing into the center. You want the tree to have good air circulation in the interior. Continue to train peach, plum and nectarine trees during the first 5 years. Pruning should be designed to train the tree outward by removing strong branches growing into the center and removing water sprouts. The tree can be topped out at 7 or 8 foot with mold and hold cuts, which are devigorating heading cuts made into two year old wood. Do this by topping back the main scaffold limb to a weaker outward growing shoot. This will keep the tree at an easy picking height as well as stimulate new growth lower on the tree. Mature trees are pruned during the dormant season. Thin out weak branches and head back long shoots as needed to maintain tree shape. Remove water sprouts. Remove any dead, damaged or diseased branches when pruning. Use mold and hold cuts to maintain trees to an easy picking height. To grow the biggest peaches, plums and nectarines, thin small fruit to no more than 1 fruit per 6 inches of branch. We know this hurts, but you’ll be rewarded with the sweetest, biggest fruit your tree can produce.

## VARIETIES

A detailed Variety List can be found on our website: [justfruitsandexotics.com](http://justfruitsandexotics.com)