



Urban Harvest

Peaches and Plums- Summer Favorites

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Photo by Kevin Fujii

Peaches are so much an icon of the Southern summer that just saying the words "Southern Peach" quickly conjures memories of the roadside vendors and farmer's markets that accompany any summer drive. Their tender sweetness, heady fragrance, and rosy perfection are valued qualities. So much so that we use the word to describe people with those same qualities - "he's a peach of a guy."

Peaches, and their cousin plums, are members of the genus *prunus*. They are stone fruits - fruits that have one seed surrounded by edible flesh. Other well known stone fruits are cherries, apricots, almonds, olives, and jujubes.

Peaches and plums are easy to grow in the home fruit garden. They are relatively small trees and they come into bearing sooner than many other fruits.

The keys to success with peaches and plums are proper selection of the variety, early training, and annual maintenance.

There are a few things you must take into consideration before making your selection - chill requirements, pollination, location, and training method.

Chill requirements

Peaches and plums grown in most of the Houston area must be rated as "low chill" varieties. Many fruiting and flowering plants require a period of exposure to temperatures between 32 degrees and 45 degrees Fahrenheit in order to complete dormancy and be ready to bloom and set fruit the following spring.

This exposure does not have to be continuous. It is the cumulative number of hours throughout fall and winter. The total number of chill hours required varies greatly by variety.

The number of chill hours that can be expected also varies widely across the Houston area. The Cypress/Bear Creek area can expect approximately 600 hours, Downtown can expect 450 hours, and the Pasadena/South Bay area can expect 350 - 450 hours.

Pollination

Many varieties of peaches are self-fruitful, meaning that they do not require another variety to provide pollen in order to set fruit. Most plums require another variety for pollination. This can be a concern for homeowners with space limitations. There are several ways that pollination can be increased.

Remember that pollinating insects have a feeding range. The tree that provides pollen to your tree does not necessarily have to be in your own landscape. If a neighbor has a suitable variety in their landscape, your tree will benefit.

Another method to assure pollination is to plant the new two-in-one trees. These trees have two varieties grafted to one rootstock and are the perfect solution for the small garden.

Locating trees in the landscape

Peaches and plums need plenty of sunlight to bloom and fruit properly. You will need a location that receives sun most of the day. Early morning sun and adequate circulation help the dew dry quickly.

Your trees will require excellent drainage. Avoid any location where water stands for several hours after a rain. Plant them in raised beds if there is any doubt.

Training

Stone fruits require diligent early training. For the first 2 - 3 years, you will need to pay particular attention to building a good framework to support fruitwood for the life of the tree.

Peaches require pruning for production. You will need to stimulate the growth of new fruit wood each year by removing one-third of all two-year old wood. Plums usually require lighter pruning than peaches.

Peaches and plums are well suited to the new high-density home orchard management system. This system is relatively new but it opens up opportunities to grow more varieties of fruit in the space allowed. [An informative workshop](#) on this exciting new idea will be offered in February. More information can be found at <http://hcmgap2.tamu.edu>.

Varieties for Houston

'[Red Baron](#)' and '[Tropic Snow](#)' are fast becoming two favorite peaches among local growers. 'Red Baron' was formerly rated as a high-chill peach, but has been growing and producing in Galveston for several years. It has fully double, dark pink blossoms and is highly ornamental as a spring blooming specimen.

'Tropic Snow' is a white-fleshed peach that virtually melts in your mouth. It blooms in a cloud of pale pink beauty. Other suitable varieties to look for are '[Mid-Pride](#)' and 'Tropic Beauty'.

'Bonanza Miniature' peach is an exciting new introduction this year. This little peach is a true genetic dwarf. It will grow perhaps only 6 feet tall over several years but will produce a profusion of blossoms and flavorful fruit.

'Beauty' and 'Mariposa' plums are a common pollinating pair. The Gulf series - 'Gulf Beauty', 'Gulf Blaze' and 'Gulf Rose' - are good choices for the entire Houston area.

Low-chill, two-in-one varieties of both peaches and plums are now available. If space is at an absolute premium, these varieties may be your best solution.

These peaches and plums will be among the fruits available at the [upcoming annual fruit tree sales](#) hosted by Urban Harvest, Master Gardeners, and the Arbor Gate. Each location will have the varieties that are suited to its surrounding area and will have experts on hand to help you with your selections. Watch the Chronicle garden calendar for dates and times and check us out on the Web at www.chron.com/houstongardening.

This column is produced by Urban Harvest. Learn about gardening classes, community gardens and orchards, farmers' markets, and more at www.urbanharvest.org.