



Urban Harvest  
Gardening for good.

## Nectarines

Category:	Temperate; deciduous
Hardiness:	Withstands normal freezes
Fruit Family:	Stone fruit
Light:	Full sun
Size:	12'-15'H x 10'-12'W average, may be pruned to desired HxW
Soil:	Well-drained, will not tolerate standing water
Planting:	Plant during dormancy in Jan – Feb

### Care of Nectarine Trees

**Planting:** Nectarines should be planted 8' to 10' from the nearest tree to allow for the limb spread. It can be planted closer, but there will be very little room between trees.

Select a planting area that is well-drained or create a raised planting bed. Remove all vegetation within a minimum three-foot diameter circle.

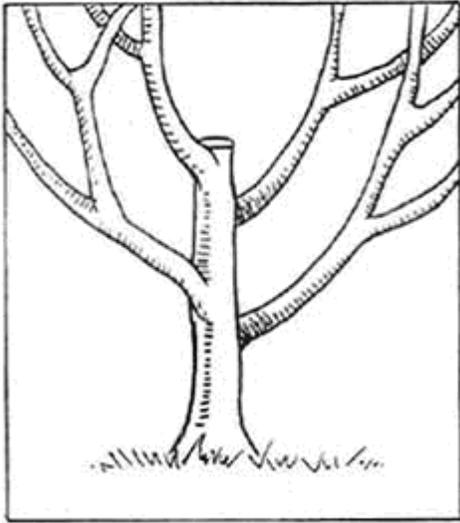
Locate the root flare; the point where the trunk transitions to the roots. Remove any nursery soil above this point, making sure the roots are still covered. Trim any roots that appear to be circling the root ball and any broken or clearly dead roots. Measure the depth of the resulting root ball.



Dig a hole that is wide and deep enough to easily accommodate the root ball. The sides of the hole should be tapered outward, not straight down (visualize a wok, not a stock pot) with the widest point at the top of the hole. The deepest point of the hole should be no deeper than your measurement of the root ball. This will allow the root flare to sit at the soil level and insures that the graft scar (located several inches about the root flare) will always be several inches above the soil level.

Place the root ball in the prepared hole. Check for straightness. Position the lowest branch you have decided to keep facing southwest. Backfill  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the depth with existing soil – no amendments should be added during planting. Water well and allow it to drain. Fill the remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the depth. Tamp the soil, but do not pack hard. Water in well and water every day for a few days unless it rains. A mulch of composted native mulch or rotted leaves is highly recommended. Do not use bark mulch.

**Pruning:** Nectarines trees need to be pruned to get sunlight onto all branches. Develop a modified central-leader scaffold with upward-sloping limbs 45° to 60° from horizontal, well-spaced around the trunk horizontally and vertically. This builds a strong infrastructure for holding the fruit and helps give



sunlight access to lower limbs. Remove crossing branches and remove or head back interior branches that go up vertically from the scaffold to increase light penetration. Fruit trees will produce little if any fruit on branches growing downward. These downward hangers should be removed.

One of the main goals of pruning nectarines is to encourage the production of new fruiting wood. In winter, head each branch that grew last summer back to fat, three headed buds halfway to one-third way down the stem. As your tree gets taller, it may get too tall to pick or prune. To prevent this, thin the leading stalk (the trunk) back to a weak upward angled side branch each winter, and thin all other branches back to at least a foot below this side branch. Nectarines may also be pruned to the “open vase” method.

**Production:** Nectarines will begin to produce in year two or three from planting. If there is fruit the year after planting, pick it off in order to allow all energy go into root development and tree growth. Thin nectarines when they are about 1” in diameter in order to develop larger, tastier fruits. Leave 5” – 6” between fruits along the branches.

**Watering:** All fruit trees should get consistent water in the first few years. Watering can come from rain or a hose. During the first year, if the soil under the mulch is dry, provide the tree with about 7 gallons of water per week, preferably once a week. Water slowly. This can be a little more than 3 minutes with a ½” hose and 1 ½ minutes with a 5/8” hose. Remember to account for rainfall when determining how much to water with a hose.

**Fertilizing:** We recommend an organic program for fruit trees in the home landscape. For a small number of trees, use a slow release organic fertilizer, available at local independent nurseries. If you have a large number of trees, or a small number of trees and a limited budget, you can use cottonseed meal, available at nurseries and feed stores. Fertilizers should be broadcast under the entire canopy space of the tree. An organic mulch of compost and native mulch, or well-rotted leaves should be maintained at all times as part of your nutrition program.

Slow release organic fertilizer: 1<sup>st</sup> year – ½ cup; 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> years – 3 pounds; subsequent years - 20 to 40 pounds per 1000 square feet. Apply every 3 – 4 months.

Cottonseed meal: 1<sup>st</sup> year – 1.5 cups; 2<sup>nd</sup> year – 3 cups; 3<sup>rd</sup> year – 6 cups; mature trees – 3 to 6 quarts per inch of trunk measured at the base. Apply in February and May.

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**Harvesting:** Ripe nectarines will vary in color depending on the variety. White-fleshed varieties will have a white to pale cream skin with varying orange to red blushes. Yellow-fleshed varieties will be more deeply blushed with orange and red over most of their skin. Nectarines do not continue ripening once they are harvested. Do not rush this process.

Begin testing for ripeness when there is less than 25% greenish tint to the skin. Cradle the fruit in your hand. Gently press the flat of your thumb near the stem end of the fruit. If it yields slightly to your gentle pressure it is probably ripe. Be careful not to bruise the fruit while testing. Lift the fruit and twist gently on the fruit stem. If it is truly ripe, it will separate easily. If it resists, it is not quite ripe. Try again in a day or two. Nectarines will not all ripen at once and should be harvested daily.

**Pests:** Nectarine fruit can be infested with Plum Curculio. Check for a small half-moon cut on the fruit. Pull off and dispose of all affected fruit. Early nectarines may avoid Plum Curculio, so it might not be a problem, but be diligent in pulling off fruit that is infected. An organic method to protect from Plum Curculio is to spray with Surround®WP, a non-toxic wettable powder that is sprayed on when the fruit is very small. It coats the fruit and prevents Plum Curculio from getting in.

**Winter Protection:** Winter protection is not necessary for nectarines. In fact, they need to acquire a specific number of chill hours in order to break dormancy and produce blooms & fruit. If the tree has open blooms in late winter/early spring, and temperatures are predicted to fall below 26° F, you may cover the tree with a cloth “tent”. It is not necessary to wrap the tree. Just drape the cloth to prevent frost from settling directly on the blossoms. Use clothespins or twine to secure the tent to the branch tips. Remove immediately after the danger has passed.



## Varieties of Nectarines for the 2020 Sale

*Snow Queen, Sun Red*

## Varieties of Nectarines for Southeast Texas

**Arctic Star:** Dark red skin, nearly freestone. White flesh with excellent, sweet flavor. Ripens in mid-June. Self-fruitful. **300 chill hours**

**Panamint:** Attractive red-skinned, yellow-fleshed freestone. Aromatic, intensely flavored, nice acid-sugar balance. Dependable, long-time favorite in warm winter climates. Ripens late July, early August. Self-fruitful. **250 chill hours**

**Snow Queen:** White-fleshed freestone of legendary status – a taste test winner and long time favorite. The flesh is so fragile that it melts in your mouth. Abundant harvest of sweet, juicy fruits in late May to June. It has some resistance to Plum Curculio and black spot. Self-fruitful. **250 - 300 chill hours**

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**Sun Red:** Medium-sized, shiny, bright red fruits with firm yellow-orange flesh and sweet, delicious flavor. Semi-freestone. Ripens mid-May to early June. Self-fruitful. **200 – 300 chill hours**