

Prunus persica: Peach¹

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Introduction

Widely popular for their sweet, juicy fruits and beautiful blossoms, Peach trees are actually plagued by so many different pests and diseases that they should probably only be planted by the horticulturally dedicated homeowner. A low, broad tree, 15 to 25 feet tall with an equal or greater spread, Peach trees form a rounded crown with upwardly-reaching branches clothed in three to six-inch-long, dark green, deciduous leaves. The lovely flowers which appear in April before the new leaves unfold are available in single, semi-double, and double forms in colors ranging from pure white to deep red and bicolors. The flowers are susceptible to damage by late spring frosts or especially cold winters. The luscious three-inch-diameter fruits mature in July to August. Bright yellow fall color really stands out in many years.



Figure 1. Young *Prunus persica*: Peach
Credits: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Prunus persica*

Pronunciation: PROO-nus PER-sick-uh

Common name(s): Peach

Family: *Rosaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 5B through 8B (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: hedge; fruit; highway median; Bonsai; espalier

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: round

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Crown density: dense
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate, serrulate
Leaf shape: lanceolate, elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: brachidodrome, pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: showy



Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray, pink, red
Flower characteristics: showy
Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: yellow, red
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: reddish, green
Current year twig thickness: thin, medium
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: tolerant
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible
Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Use and Management

They have been successfully used in medians of boulevards and around parking lots in a number of Texas communities. They make effective screens for six to seven-months due to their dense, low-branching habit, but are not particularly attractive in winter. Avoid excessive pruning as this stimulates internal sprouting. Many trees live only 8 to 15-years.

Peach trees should be located in full sun or partial shade on very well-drained, moist, acid soils. The trees should be kept on a regular spray and fertilization schedule to insure best fruit production but this is not needed if fruit is not important. Do not allow water to stand around the roots.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

Pests

Aphids cause distortion of new growth, deposits of honeydew, and sooty mold.

Borers attack flowering Peach. Keep trees healthy with regular fertilizer applications.

Scales of several types infest *Prunus* spp. Horticultural oil is used for some control of scales.

Spider mites cause yellowing or stippling but they are very difficult to see.

Tent caterpillars make large webbed nests in trees then eat the foliage. One defoliation may not be serious and small nests can be pruned out and destroyed. Use *Bacillus thuringiensis* when the insects are first seen and are still small.

Diseases

Peach leaf curl can attack flowering Peach. The leaves have red, curled, and distorted areas.

A bacterium causes leaf spot and twig cankers on Peach. Small, reddish spots dry, and drop out, giving a shot holed appearance. Defoliation can be severe when conditions

favor disease development. Fertilize infected trees and prune out infected branches.

A fungus causes reddish spots which drop out leaving shot holes. Once the holes appear the leaves may drop. The disease is worse in wet weather, but usually does not require control measures.

Black knot causes black swellings or galls on the branches. Branches with galls are pruned out.

Powdery mildew causes a white coating on the leaves.

Peach trees may be subject to witches broom. Branches are deformed and clusters of small branches form. Infected branches bloom and leaf out earlier. Brooms are pruned out.