



Peach pie, peach crisp, or a peach fresh off the tree, nothing beats the taste of a homegrown peach. Growing peaches in Nebraska isn't as easy as it sounds, but with a little research and some careful planning, you can pick peaches for years to come.

Knowing a little bit about the crop you are growing will go a long way. You will have to be patient if you plant peaches. Peach trees will take a couple of years before they start to produce fruit. Also, peach trees in Nebraska are not long lived, compared to an apple or pear anyway. In a commercial setting, a peach tree will live on average about 8 years. If a peach orchard is what you are wanting, be prepared to replace peach trees often for continued fruit production. While it may be tempting to plant the pit of an amazing peach you ate, there isn't a guarantee that the peach tree that sprouts will have the exact same quality of fruit. With fruit trees, crosspollination can happen. This means the pit from the fruit you ate could be different genetically than the tree it was growing on. This difference won't be known for several years until tree begins to produce fruit. For best production, select a peach cultivar from a reputable source, not from yesterday's pit.

Just like with apples, the most important steps in planting a peach orchard happens before the ground is even touched. Planning is the most important task because fruit trees are long-term investments. Two main factors that need to be taken into consideration include the growing environment and tree selection.

The growing environment is one critical factor to look at in the planning process. Light is key component of the growing environment to consider. Most fruit crops will need to receive at least 6 to 8 hours of direct, mid-day sun for best production. If there is much less than 6 hours the growth and production of the tree will be compromised. Make sure there is enough space between the trees so shading isn't an issue. Low lying areas, or frost pockets, should be avoided. These areas can allow cool air to settle and increase the risk of frost or cold damage to blossoms. South facing slopes with some earlier blooming fruit trees, like apricot or peach, should also be avoided. These slopes warm up faster in the spring, which could mean an earlier bloom that is susceptible to frost damage.

After the perfect location is chosen, cultivar selection is one of the most important tasks. Fruit tree cultivars should be selected based upon their vigor, productivity, climate adaptability, fruit quality, disease resistance, and personal preferences. Most peach cultivars are available on dwarfing rootstocks to make the trees smaller in size, but this is not totally reliable. Seedling rootstocks, trees grown on their own rootstock, is more dependable. Other factors to consider are whether the fruits are freestone or clingstone, this determines how easily the peach flesh separates from the pit. Most peaches are self-fruitful meaning that they don't require another tree to pollinate. There are several cultivars that are hardy for Nebraska, select the one that works best for your growing environment and situation. For a list of fruit tree cultivars for Nebraska, visit <http://extensionpubs.unl.edu/> and search 'fruit tree' or follow this link <http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g1005.pdf>.

All fruits are susceptible to insect pests and disease organisms, peaches included. As with any tree, an integrated pest management approach will be needed. Some common issues with peaches include peach tree borer, oozing bacterial canker, peach leaf curl, and late spring frost damage. Careful monitoring and control of pest early will help to decrease inputs during the growing season. If less-than-perfect fruits are okay and resistant cultivars are selected, a spray schedule could be cut back or not needed at all. If you have the same issues year after year, targeted applications allow you to spray at specific times during the growing season to target certain pests. If 'grocery store' quality fruit is your goal, be prepared to apply the fruit tree sprays routinely throughout the growing season to protect the fruit on those susceptible cultivars from pests.

With a little homework and some know how you can ensure that everything is just peachy with your home orchard for years to come

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