

Demonstrations Provided on Peach Thinning

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

Thinning fruits is the hardest of all tasks for the novice peach grower but it must be done to produce a high-quality harvest. Peaches should be thinned before they reach the size of a dime. Master Gardener volunteers will conduct a hands-on demonstration on thinning peach trees on Thursday, March 19, at the Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park.

I will report the not-so-good news first: This winter's weather conditions have not been kind to home gardeners who plan to grow tomatoes, peppers and other warm season vegetables as their planting time as been considerably delayed.

Now to the really good news: The often cool, but not quite freezing, temperatures of the winter season have been most favorable

to home fruit tree growers. Thanks to the amount of chill hours accumulated, low chill peach and plum trees have produced exceptionally heavy fruit loads.

I was concerned that the peach trees growing in the Master Gardener Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park might sustain freeze injury but temperatures did not drop below freezing

over most areas. That's more good news.

The not-so-good news is that the heavy crop of developing peaches will need to be thinned — and that undertaking can be a daunting task for most novice home peach growers. Most of us especially enjoy seeing the hot-pink blossoms produced by peach trees that signal the end of the winter season.



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To a commercial peach producer, the sight of colorful blooms signals an approaching task known as fruit thinning. Homeowners should also realize the importance of this not-so-easy task of relieving peach trees of their overabundant crop of peaches that will result in a harvest of small-size, low-quality fruits.

How does one properly thin the fruit on a peach tree? It certainly requires determination and we can provide the know-how. If you need some one-on-one coaching from Master Gardeners with considerable experience with thinning peach trees, see the At a Glance inset for more details on this upcoming, hands-on demonstration.

The decision is whether to have a lot of small, low-quality peaches or a very decent yield of meaty, high-quality fruits. Too many fruits on a tree can also result in broken limbs and peaches that are mostly pit and little flesh.

A properly planted, properly pruned and well-cared for peach tree is capable of producing up to 400 pounds of peaches in our growing area. You can get ample amounts of inferior size peaches without thinning or you can aim for the larger-sized peaches.

Thinning is the hardest of all tasks for the novice fruit grower. That's why Master Gardeners are conducting the demonstration for home peach growers. During a similar peach thinning demonstration held last spring I was reminded of how difficult this task is when a husband stated that he

was sure glad his wife came with him as he would not have had the courage to remove so many baby peaches from their trees at home. Peaches should be thinned when the fruit is no larger than the width of a dime. The longer the fruit has to mature under the ideally thinned situation, the larger it will get—less competition for nutrients and water equals larger fruit.

How late in the season can you wait to thin? If you can easily cut through the pits of the peaches with a sharp knife, then it will be of some benefit to thin. However, remember that the earlier thinning is accomplished, the greater the benefits in terms of fruit size and quality.

If you only have one or a few trees in the back yard, it's easy enough to remove them by hand — just give them a little twist, and off they come. Fruit should be thinned until all peaches are at least 5-to-6 inches apart on the branch and there are no twin (or side-by-side) fruit.

When thinning, look at the number of fruit remaining on the tree and not at the ground. Master Gardeners Herman Auer and Robert Marshall thinned the peaches on a Tropic Beauty peach tree last week and removed 1,121 peaches. That's why I advise gardeners to not look down when thinning as doing so will likely prevent you from removing enough fruit.

Excessive fruit load can cause tree limbs to break. Excessive fruit set often will also result in small fruit with poor flavor. One more cau-

tionary note: Excessive fruit set also can result in alternate bearing in which a tree will produce little or no fruit in the year following a large fruit crop.

When you complete this task, the ground will be covered with small peaches, and you probably will feel that you have lost your entire crop. But in reality, at harvest time you will likely realize that you did not thin enough.

Needless to say peach thinning is not one of the more enjoyable tasks at the orchard but biting into a sweet juicy peach later in the spring makes all of the hard work worth it!

At a Glance

WHAT: Hands-on Demonstrations on Thinning Peaches

WHEN: Thursday, March 19, 9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

WHERE: Program conducted in Carbide Park (4102 Main Street, La Marque) in the Master Gardener Horticulture Demonstration Garden

WHO: Master Gardeners will provide hand-on demonstrations on properly thinning peaches.

