

PEACH THINNING IS TOUGH BUT NECESSARY TASK

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTOS BY **William M. Johnson**



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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.

Most of us especially enjoy seeing blooms produced by fruit trees that signal the end of the winter season. 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 "overload."

Even though you unmerci-

fully pruned the poor creature's branches soon after last year's harvest season was over, the tree will likely still have too many peaches on it this spring to produce a high-quality crop later in the summer. Most peach trees in our area have produced an abundance of fruit this spring, meaning that most trees are even more likely to have too many peaches to produce a high-quality

crop of fruits—and that in turn means that some fruits have to go!

How does one properly thin the fruit of a peach tree? First and foremost, you must have will power! In an earlier column, I mentioned that a properly planted, properly pruned and well-cared for peach tree is capable of producing up to 400 pounds of peaches. It takes about



382 small peaches measuring 3/4" diameter to make a bushel, while it only takes 158 peaches measuring 2½" diameter to make the same bushel.

One bushel of peaches typically weighs 48 to 50 pounds. In other words, you can get ample amounts of inferior size peaches without thinning or you can aim for the larger sized peaches. It's a lot less effort and the end result in total poundage will likely be the same—it's a no brainer.

Thinning is the hardest of all tasks for the novice fruit grower. Last week, the Master Gardeners started thinning fruits on peach trees in the Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park. I was reminded of how difficult this task is when one of the newer Master Gardeners exclaimed that she would not have had the courage to remove so many baby peaches.

Peaches should be thinned when the fruit is still as small as 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 6-to-8 inches apart on the branch and there are no twin (or side-by-side) fruits.

When thinning, look at the number of fruit remaining on the tree and not at the ground. Looking at the ground will likely prevent you from removing enough fruit.

Excessive fruit load can cause tree limbs to break. Excessive fruit set will often also result in small fruit with poor flavor. One more cautionary note: excessive fruit set can also 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.

I thinned a peach tree a few years ago and counted the number of fruits. I had removed more than one thousand peaches! Peaches were thinned at the half-dime diameter stage; trees normally abort a portion of the initial fruit set as fruits enlarge.

Be sure to attend hands-on demonstrations of peach fruit thinning provided by Galveston County Master Gardeners. The first demonstration will be provided on Thursday, March 24 (see inset for more information). 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: 9:00 - 11:00 a.m., Thursday, March 24

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

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

What: **Texas-Tuff Landscape Plants . . . Blooming & Beautiful**

WHEN: 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., Tuesday, March 29

WHO: Master Gardener Sandra Devall will provide a PowerPoint program on choosing healthy, hearty plants for your landscape that will be ornamental as well as welcoming to bees and other pollinators, birds and butterflies. Program will touch on ways to bring beauty to the garden.

LOCATION: Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main Street, La Marque).

RSVP: Pre-registration required (phone: 218-309-5065; e-mail GAL-V3@wt.net).

