



By Barbara Elmore, HCMG

## How to Plant a Peach Tree

Did you know that planting a peach tree on a hilltop is a good idea if you live in Texas' Hill Country?

Peach grower Jamey Vogel of Vogel Orchards dispensed that tip and others last year in a workshop. Since this is a good time for planting peach trees, here's more advice:

1. Planting a peach tree on a hilltop offers protection that may save the fruit during a late freeze. Frost will kill peaches, and on some mornings the temperature on a hill will be 10 to 15 degrees higher.
2. Plant in full sun and far away from oak, pecan and other peach trees. Bigger trees will draw away water and nutrients. Also, plant peach trees at least 10 feet away from a concrete driveway.
3. Peaches do well in sandy soil 18 to 24 inches deep. If the topsoil is deeper than that, nutrients leach past the root zone. This means the tree will die after five or six years, or will be stunted. Peach trees will grow in clay but will need more water because heavy clay dries out quickly. If you want to plant an orchard, have your soil tested by AgriLife Extension service. Report the type of crop you want to plant and Extension will recommend what you need to add to the soil for optimal production.
4. Use root stimulator in the water before planting trees to give the roots the best chance of developing. The roots of a planted peach tree will go beyond the canopy of the tree. The ideal size tree for planting is between 24 and 36 inches.
5. Dig a hole deep enough to completely cover the tree's roots, and let the roots spread out. Cut back the lowest branches. Cover the trunk with foil about 12 inches up from the ground to prevent growth at the bottom of the tree. This also protects the trunk from herbicides. Do not use broadleaf weed killers on or around new trees because the chemicals will kill them. Mulch well.
- 6.. For this area, get a variety that likes between 600 and 700 chilling hours. Chilling hours are the hours in winter after the first hard freeze that the temperature is below 45 degrees. Although you will not lose a crop because of a lack of chilling hours, you will have a weaker crop. Nurseries can tell you what the chilling hours are for the variety you are buying, and the AgriLife Extension service offers maps for chilling regions.
7. Peach trees do not like wet feet. Build up your ground if the planting area stays wet. Also, keep grass away from the peach trees because grass competes with the tree.
8. After planting, prune off shoots and shape the canopy. On a growing peach tree, try to open the canopy for air circulation and sunlight penetration. Sunlight helps the sugar content of the peach.
9. Peach trees are self-pollinating, which means you don't need more than one. However, no peach tree is deer-resistant, and deer can damage a young tree. So try to keep out the deer and plant more than one tree.
10. Trees will bear their first fruit at about age three. They age quickly and decline after 12 to 13 years. Some trees live to be 40 years old or older, but that's unusual.



Fredericksburg peach grower Jamey Vogel

