

Fruits and Nuts

Selecting Quality Peaches

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Fresh peaches provide a real summer taste treat. With proper preservation, they may be enjoyed all year long.

Peaches are called the “Queen of Fruits.” They are grown commercially in most areas of Tennessee except for the Cumberland Plateau and the higher elevations of East Tennessee. Most years the peach harvest in Tennessee will extend from about June 1 through August.

Peaches may be purchased at grocery stores, at fruit and vegetable markets and at the farms where they are grown. On-farm markets may offer harvested fruit for sale or give you the opportunity to pick your own. Since peaches attain their highest quality when allowed to tree ripen, the best fruit will be that which is grown locally. Ripe peaches are much too fragile to withstand shipment to distant markets.

How to Select Ripe Fruit

Regardless of whether you are buying peaches that are already harvested or picking your own, the following tips should assist you in selecting the best fruit:

1. Red striping or blushing is not always a reliable indicator of ripeness. Red color on a peach is a varietal trait and may develop well in advance of ripening. The amount of red may vary from year to year or among various locations throughout the trees. It is not neces-

sary for ripeness or high quality.

2. Ground color is the base color of the entire fruit. It can be used as a ripeness indicator. An immature peach will have a green ground color. As it ripens, the ground color will change to pale green, yellowish green and, finally, yellow for yellow-fleshed varieties. With white-fleshed varieties, the ground color will change from green to a whitish appearance. The area around the stem is a good place to observe ground color changes.
3. Do not squeeze peaches to see if they are soft and ripe! Squeezing will cause bruises on the fruit that are unattractive and will result in a loss of fruit quality.
4. Freckles or spots that appear on the peach skin do not necessarily detract from fruit quality. These spots may be weather-related and are extremely difficult to prevent. In most cases, peeling the peaches will remove these spots, as they do not extend down into the flesh.

Types of Peaches Grown in Tennessee

1. Clingstones are generally the first types of peaches to ripen in Tennessee. The flesh will adhere to the pit, making the peaches difficult to use for canning, freezing, etc. They are, however, good for fresh consumption.
2. Semi-cling (semi-free) varieties are those in which the flesh may cling to the pit somewhat in certain years. In other years, the flesh may not cling—especially when



the peaches are fully ripe. Redhaven is generally classified as a semi-cling variety.

3. Freestone varieties make up the bulk of the peaches grown in the eastern United States. With these varieties, the flesh separates readily from the pit when the peaches are ripe.

In some areas of the country, clingstone peach varieties are grown for processing. These are different varieties than the clingstone varieties grown for fresh consumption. Processing peaches have a firm (non-melting) flesh that stands up well during processing. They are not as good when eaten fresh.

Most of the peach varieties grown in Tennessee have yellow flesh. A few varieties will have white flesh. Perhaps the best known of these is Georgia Belle.

How to Pick Peaches

If you are going to pick your own peaches, consider the following suggestions:

1. Always call ahead to determine the hours of operation of the market and which varieties are being harvested.
2. Wear clothes that are comfortable to work in.
3. Determine if you need to take containers or if they are available at the orchard.
4. Peaches ripen first in the tops and the outsides of the trees where sunlight exposure is best. Peaches inside the tree canopy will be delayed in ripening and should be harvested at a later date.
5. Grasp the peach gently with the palm and fingers of your hands. Grasping with the fingertips will result in considerable fruit bruising.
6. Lift and turn the peach. Don't pull it off the tree. Lay the fruit gently in containers to reduce the risk of bruising.
7. Don't stack ripe fruit more than three deep in containers. The weight of the top peaches will bruise fruit in the bottom of containers.

8. Carefully examine the first few peaches picked to acquaint yourself with how ripe peaches should appear. Once you have done this, it will be quicker and easier to select the best fruit.

Storing Peaches

Peach fruits are alive. They are fragile. Take care to maximize the time that peaches are at their best quality.

1. Don't transport ripe peaches at high temperatures for long periods of time. If you have far to drive once you have purchased your fruit, consider using a cooler to store the peaches during transit.
2. Keep mature peaches cool. Mature peaches may be held seven to 10 days in a refrigerator. Check fruit at regular intervals to find the ripest peaches.
3. If the peaches are not fully ripe, allow them to ripen at room temperature and then refrigerate. Since all the peaches will not ripen at the same time, sort through them periodically and remove the ripe fruit.

Peaches are excellent when eaten fresh, frozen, canned or dried. Remember that preserving food will not improve the quality of the picked product. Always start with the best quality peaches and take care to maintain this quality at all times.

Peach Arithmetic

One pound fresh Tennessee peaches = 3 medium or 2 large peaches OR 2 cups peeled and sliced OR 1 2/3 cups peeled and diced OR 1 1/2 cups peeled and pureed.

Table 2 lists some of the most common peach varieties produced and sold in Tennessee. Harvest dates are approximate and will vary among different parts of the state.

Table 1. Peach Nutritional Information

Serving = 1 medium peach	
Calories	35
Protein	1 gram
Carbohydrates	10 grams
Potassium	171 milligrams
Calcium	4 milligrams
Phosphorus	10 milligrams
Dietary Fiber	3 grams

Variety	Approximate Date 1st Harvest	Cling or Freestone ¹	Flesh Color ²	Suggested Uses ³
Surecrop	June 15-25	C	Y	A
Redhaven	July 4-14	S	Y	A, C
Nectar	July 10-20	F	W	A
Sunhigh	July 18-28	F	Y	A, B, C
Loring	July 20-30	F	Y	A, C
Georgia Belle (Belle of Georgia), (Belle)	August 7-17	F	W	C
Redskin	August 8-18	F	Y	A, C
Elberta	August 10-20	F	Y	B, C, A

1/ C = clingstone; S = semi-clingstone; F = freestone

2/ Y = yellow flesh; W = white flesh

3/ A = fresh; B = canning; C = freezing

For more information on peaches and other fruits, contact your county Extension office. Extension PB 746, **Tree Fruit, Tree Nut and Small Fruit Cultivar Recommendations for Tennessee**, lists additional peach varieties and gives some characteristics of each.

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