

# Peaches and Plums (*Prunus* spp.)



**Exposure:** Full sun, zone 5-8. Beach plums zone 3-8.

**Soil:** Well-drained garden soil. Chickasaw and beach plums prefer sandy soil, but will grow in any well-drained soil.

## **Growth habits:**

- Peach (*Prunus persica*): Peaches are usually grown as an open-spreading vase-shaped small tree to 15 feet. Peaches are self-fertile with attractive pink flowers in mid-spring followed by large luscious, juicy yellow fruit in mid to late summer. Peach's long pointed dark green leaves give the tree an almost tropical appearance. Choose late blooming varieties to avoid late frost damage. Use peaches as home orchard trees or as small spreading trees in mixed shrub borders. To grow really fine peaches requires focus and attention from their steward. Not for the negligent gardener. Peaches are the finest flavored of all temperate fruits in Chuck's opinion. To eat a peach is to approach the divine through the delight of the senses.
- Dwarf peach (*Prunus persica*): Dwarf peaches grow to 5 feet high and wide. Their long pointed leaves give them the look of a tropical plant or Dr. Suess character. They produce full-size fruit.
- American plum (*Prunus Americana*): Native plum seedlings growing to 12 feet. Fruit is succulent and juicy with a tough skin and is best cooked. A tea made from the scraped inner bark is used as a wash to treat various skin problems and as a mouth wash to treat sores. A poultice of the inner bark is disinfectant and is used as a treatment on cuts and wounds.
- Beach plum (*Prunus maritima*): Beautiful white flowers, compact growing, and extremely productive. Can be pruned to attain a small tree to 6 feet or used for an informal hedge up to 10 feet wide. The 'Nana' variety will grow to 3-4' tall and wide with a weeping form. Salt tolerant and cold hardy. Once established, requires little or no maintenance. One of the last plums to blossom so rarely is frozen out. Specimen, patio plant, in small groupings or as a foundation plant. Fruit color can vary from black, blue, red, or yellow. Beach plums are highly valued for preserves and jelly. Great to eat right off the bush. High in vitamin A; about 1,000 IU in a cup and cholesterol-lowering pectin.
- Bounty plum (*Prunus Nigra*): The medium to large dark-red fruit has an orange-yellow flesh and is tender, sweet and juicy - the quality is fair for dessert and good for canning; it ripens in late August. An upright spreading tree, it is very hardy and productive. Thrives in loamy soils and does well in dappled shade, but sunny positions maximize fruit yield. Need two seedlings for cross pollination.
- Chickasaw plum (*Prunus angustifolia*): This Southeastern native forms clumps or colonies 15-20 feet tall by 20 feet wide. Trees tend to be broad spreading and can be pruned to a single stem. Native from Maryland south to Florida and then west to Texas. Has cleaner foliage than American plum. An excellent wildlife shelterbelt plant or shrub border companion. Also nice as a specimen tree. Chickasaw Plum's white spring flowers produce sweet, tangy, juicy, cherry-sized red to yellow fruit in early to mid summer that is good for fresh eating or for making memorable wild plum preserves.

## **Pollination:**

- Peaches, chickasaw plums: Self fertile.
- American plum, beach plum, and bounty plum: Two required for pollination.

## **Caring for your peaches and plums**

**Pruning:** In the late winter when the heavy freezes are over, prune away any damaged or diseased limbs, and crossing branches. In the summer, after fruiting, you can also prune to shape the plant.

**Watering:** The plant will likely need to be watered once a week if there isn't enough rain.

**Fertilization:** Apply a good general purpose fertilizer in April and June.

### **Frequently asked questions about peaches and pears**

There's sap or ooze coming out of the trunk or branches. What's up with that?

For most peaches and plums, this is a bad sign - possibly borers, or a fungal or bacterial infection. Contact your Extension agent for a diagnosis.

Young dwarf peaches will sometimes take up more water from their roots than the tops can expire, so the extra water oozes of the branches. This is not dangerous and can be controlled by reducing the moisture given to the plant.

### **Additional information**

See the Useful Plants Nursery website at [www.usefulplants.org](http://www.usefulplants.org) for videos demonstrating planting and other plant care techniques.