

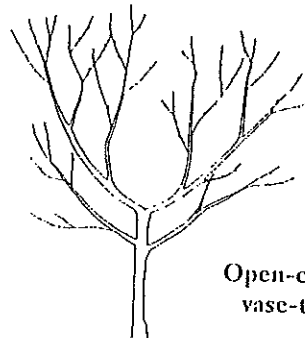
# Pruning The Peach Tree

Peach and nectarine trees benefit from rather heavy pruning, and can be pruned in some cases up to 75% of the previous season's wood. A young tree can be trained to have three central leaders—the main stems that arise from the trunk. A double or triple leader peach tree will develop into a strong tree with plenty of vigor and capacity for fruiting as well as strength to carry the fruit to maturity. If the tree is not lending it's self to develop three leaders, or if space is limited, a forked, Y-shaped, two-leader tree is better than a tree with a single leader. A single leader peach tree tends to over grow in the top and begins to thin at the bottom due to shading. A peach tree that can be pruned to an open funnel shape will allow for better light and air penetration to the leaves. When choosing main scaffolding on a young tree, choose limbs that originate at different heights on the tree. Peach trees have rather weak wood and tend to split and break at the crotch especially if all limbs originate from one place off the trunk. On a young tree the first three or four years will be devoted to developing a strong primary and then secondary set of scaffolds. Scaffolding is simply branching and sub-branching. Attempt to prune to the funnel configuration on the tree, favoring outward growing wood to inward on a young tree, and upward growth rather than outward growth on a mature tree. Fruiting occurs on one year old wood— the twigs and stems that grew last summer. On a one year old twig will be several buds, but only the buds that are in the middle one third of the twig are the best ones to produce fruit, although it will flower all along the twig length, cut back one year old stems by one third. This will give you a larger yield and a bigger fruit. Any wood that has already borne fruit should be removed; it will not fruit again. Cut back weak shoots; remove diseased wood, and any criss-crossing limbs. Prune out one-year-old wood from the center, keeping the center of the tree open. Peaches have a tendency to grow fruiting wood upward and outward from the main trunk. Prune to counteract this growth-pattern, to give an even branch distribution throughout the entire tree. On a mature tree, one-year-old wood should be about a foot apart all over the top of the tree, and at least 60% of the previous years wood will be pruned away. Heavy pruning of peach and nectarine trees will keep fruit production on heavier wood, which is more capable of carrying the weight of a full crop. A good balance of growth and fruiting should be striven for. A summer pruning technique on a fruiting peach tree is to head back upper, outer shoots in late summer to allow sunlight to the lower branches and prevent dieback due to shading. The peach tree will set more fruit than it normally can carry and will drop a large number of immature fruits early on. This is normal and prevents the tree from breaking and sapping it's vigor, usually occurring around June. If the tree is still carrying too much weight in your opinion, the excess can be hand picked after the June drop.

**■ Peaches, Vase.** Peach trees set fruit on branches that grew the previous year. Remove about two thirds of new growth to keep crop from becoming overwhelming.

**Open Center.** The open center method, also known as the open top or vase method, is an excellent way to let more light into the shady interior of a tree. Since this method produces a tree with a weaker branch structure than if it had a strong central leader, the lightweight fruits are the best subjects: quinces, crab apples, plums, cherries, peaches, nectarines, and apricots.

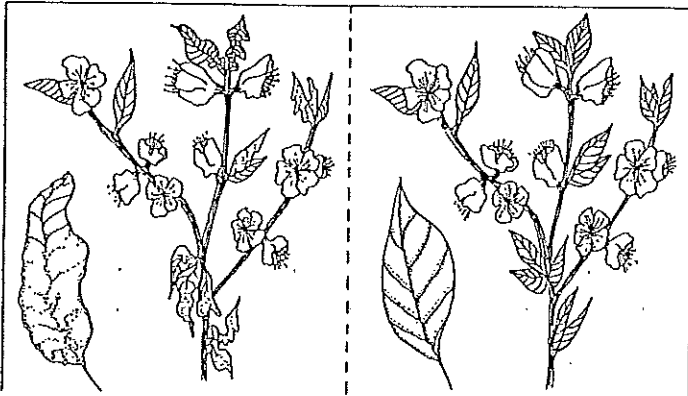
Prune so that the limbs forming the vase effect do not all come out of the main trunk close to each other, or they will form a cluster of weak crotches. Even with the whole center of the tree open, you'll have to thin the branches and remove the older limbs eventually, just as you would with a tree pruned in the central leader method.



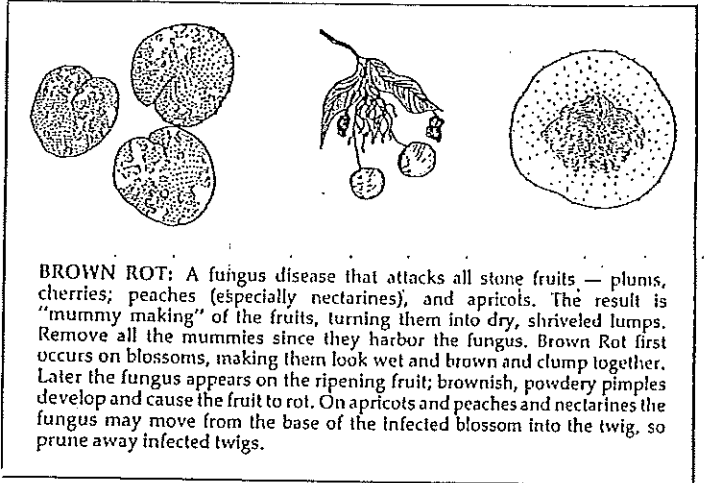
Open-center or vase-trained

## Peach Diseases

Spraying to prevent peach leaf curl is imperative on peaches and nectarines. Once the leaf opens, and shows signs of the disease, there is nothing you can do about it until the next dormant season. Spray now with a dormant spray and again, just before the buds break. Peach leaf curl is treated with a copper based spray, and works best if applied with a sticker/ spreader added to the spray mix. Sticker/ spreader is just that- it helps the copper stay stuck to the tree, a big plus in rainy weather, and emulsifies it so it spreads across the surface of the tree bark more evenly. These two are often sold together as a package.



**PEACH LEAF CURL:** On the left, symptoms on new growth; on the right, normal development. Watch for this disorder when leaves start to unfold in the spring; remove any that show curling and fertilize the tree with nitrogen to stimulate new healthy leaves. Unattended, peach leaf curl will slow the growth of new shoots, affect young fruit, and cause leaves to drop with warm, dry weather. A mild infection will allow fruit to mature normally except for one or more wartlike growths and a lack of fuzz. Peach varieties vary in susceptibility though none seem to be immune.



**BROWN ROT:** A fungus disease that attacks all stone fruits — plums, cherries; peaches (especially nectarines), and apricots. The result is "mummy making" of the fruits, turning them into dry, shriveled lumps. Remove all the mummies since they harbor the fungus. Brown Rot first occurs on blossoms, making them look wet and brown and clump together. Later the fungus appears on the ripening fruit; brownish, powdery pimples develop and cause the fruit to rot. On apricots and peaches and nectarines the fungus may move from the base of the infected blossom into the twig, so prune away infected twigs.