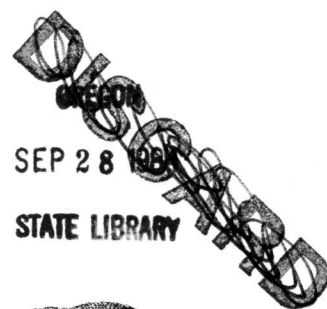


# Selecting Peach Varieties for the Willamette Valley



Peaches do well in a climate characterized by fairly mild winters and long, hot summers. When grown in a rainy climate like that of the Willamette Valley, they are often seriously affected by diseases, principally peach leaf curl, coryneum blight, bacterial canker, and brown rot.

Peach trees also require protection from insect pests such as the peach and prune root borer and the peach twig borer. Unless you protect your trees adequately with the proper pesticides, these diseases and insects can severely damage or kill them.

Peach trees bloom early in spring when the weather is either cool and rainy or clear and frosty. In unprotected orchards, peach crops are frequently lost to spring frost.

Several peach growers in the Willamette Valley protect their orchards from spring frost by using either overtree sprinklers or orchard heaters.

Orchards located 100 feet or more above the valley floor are subject to less fog and frost and to cooler temperatures. Some good peach varieties will bear more consistently on such sites than on the river bottom or first bench.

Unfortunately, irrigation water often is not available at higher elevations. Although peaches can be grown on deeper soils without irrigation, it is necessary to irrigate for maximum fruit size and production.

Peach trees are usually grown on peach seedling roots and spaced about 20 feet apart on the square, which gives 108 trees per acre.



Arrangements with trees spaced 14 by 20 feet (155 trees per acre) or even closer are also feasible—provided you prune your trees sufficiently, usually in both summer and winter, to prevent overcrowding.

To maintain production, increase fruit size, and prevent tree breakage, prune your trees thoroughly each year.

Peaches require relatively intensive care. For this reason, few peach trees survive in home gardens. All of the hazards mentioned above can combine

to make peach growing in the Willamette Valley a risky business, even for commercial orchardists.

Most Willamette Valley peaches are sold on the farm, directly to the consumer for home canning and freezing, or at a nearby roadside market. A small percentage of peaches are sold in baskets to retail stores.

Few peaches are packed and shipped. None are grown for commercial processing because of high production costs and inconsistent production.

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OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERVICE

Despite production difficulties, peaches remain the most popular summer fruit available at roadside stands and in U-pick orchards.

Most customers know the name “Elberta.” Many know “Redhaven.” And a few will recognize “Veteran” as one of the most common peach varieties in the Willamette Valley.

However, because of numerous breeding programs around the United States and Canada, there are now dozens of new peach varieties that are better than these early introductions.

Performance of peach varieties can differ from one location to another and from one year to the next. You should evaluate new varieties in your own test plot before deciding which variety will best suit your needs.

## Varieties

Although hundreds of peach varieties have been tested in the Willamette Valley, only a few are grown commercially. For the most part, these varieties tend to bear more regularly than others. You can overlook a peach’s inferior qualities if it will bear fruit regularly! The following varieties are listed in order of ripening (our dates, of course, are approximate).

**Springcrest** (July 16). The fruit are small to medium-sized and round, with skin color showing a red blush on yellow. The flesh is moderately firm, melting, and semifreestone when fully ripe. The quality of Springcrest is good. It’s the earliest variety for commercial drive-in trade, but don’t plant too many—later varieties of better quality may follow soon after.

**Golden Gem** (July 21) is a consistent bearer with good flavor, but in 1982 it yielded a high percentage of split pit.

**Harrow 719** (July 23). Small fruit that hang on the tree ripe for more than a week are characteristic of this variety. Some growers prefer it over Golden Gem.

**Gemfree** (July 26). The fruit are large with a red over yellow skin color. The flesh is meaty to melting and freestone. Cropping was heavy on this variety in 1983. A low percentage of split pit occurred in 1982; however, in 1983, 60% split pit was observed.

**Early Redhaven** (last week of July) originated as a “sport” (mutation) of the popular variety, Redhaven. It is reported to be a less reliable producer than Redhaven, with a tendency to split pits and coarser flesh. The flesh is yellow and semicling, the skin red. Its shape is less pointed than Redhaven’s, but the tree resembles Redhaven. Very few Early Redhaven trees are grown in the Willamette Valley.

**Harbelle** (July 31) produces a large, round fruit with a red blush on yellow skin. The flesh is firm, melting, slow to brown, and freestone, and it has a good flavor. The tree is small, cold-hardy, of moderate vigor, and it’s a consistent producer.

**Rochester** (August 1) is an old variety that is still popular with a few growers because it blooms late and bears more regularly than other varieties. It has a relatively long picking season. The fruit are nearly round, with a mottled red skin color, and red around the pit. They are semicling, bruise easily, and have stringy flesh when canned. Also, the heavy coat of fuzz makes them a less attractive fruit. Its fresh flavor, however, is juicy, sweet, and appealing.

The trees grow vigorously and tend to be more upright than Early Elberta. Strong scaffold limbs, which can support large crops, are characteristic. Rochester is very susceptible to bacterial canker and is seldom planted in the Willamette Valley any more.

**Sunhaven** (August 2) produces uniformly shaped, medium-large fruit that are nearly round in shape. The skin is bright red over golden, and the flesh is yellow flecked with red. Sunhaven is freestone when fully ripe and resembles

Redhaven. The fruit have good flavor and fine, firm texture; they resist browning. The tree is large, vigorous, and consistently productive. Less thinning is necessary because the tree will support a large number of fruit.

**Redhaven** (August 3) was once the most extensively planted freestone-type peach in the world. Fruit size is medium if the tree is well-thinned. The fruit are round with prominent suture and apex. Skin color is yellow overlaid with red; the flesh is yellow with red around the pit. The fruit are firm, fine-textured, melting, and almost freestone when fully ripe, but the pits are difficult to remove and the skins tend to tear easily on picking. This variety has an outstandingly good flavor when fresh, frozen, or canned.

There may be different mutant strains of Redhaven in the nursery trade. Oregon growers recommend the Michigan strain.

The tree is vigorous and a consistently heavy bearer, except when there is spring frost. In favorable years, it sets very heavy crops that require extensive thinning. Redhaven trees also need heavy pruning to obtain the best development of fruit color.

A compact mutant of Redhaven was introduced in the 1970’s, but it hasn’t gained much favor with orchardists (probably because of the difficulty in handling its excessive branching and horizontal growth habit).

**Harken** (August 4). The fruit are large and have a yellow overlain with red blush skin color. The flesh is firm, juicy, and almost smooth with a sweet, rich flavor. It also is freestone and slow to brown. The tree is productive, moderately vigorous, and cold-hardy.

**Redtop** (August 7) produces large fruit that are nearly round, except for a pointed apex. The skin is yellow with a red blush; the flesh is yellow, very firm, fine-grained. Redtop is good canned or frozen. It’s the first true freestone. The tree is willowy, and the

fruit hangs on the tree for up to 10 days when ripe.

**July Elberta** (August 9 to 19) was introduced by Luther Burbank in 1930. So it's also known as Burbank Elberta and by several other names. Unfortunately, it's often confused with the late ripening variety called Early Elberta or Improved Elberta, because July Elberta is also called "Early Elberta."

July Elberta is a fairly reliable bearer in the Willamette Valley. It withstands handling comparatively well and is good for fresh consumption, freezing, or canning. The fruit is firm and freestone. The flesh is yellow with a slight reddening at the pit. In some seasons, however, it can develop a dark, dull skin color, stringy flesh, and thick fuzz.

**Fairhaven** (August 16). The fruit are medium-large and round in shape. The skin is yellow with red cheek and smooth, but tough. Its flesh is yellow with red at the pit, very firm, and moderately fine-textured. It is freestone,

resists browning, and has a good flavor, which makes it ideal for freezing and canning.

**Slappy** (mid-August) is grown in the Willamette Valley only to a very limited extent. It's an old variety that at one time was a favorite for home canning; however, it's a relatively unreliable bearer. The fruit is round-conic to flat in shape with a deep, prominent suture (sometimes the suture is rough and warty in appearance). The skin is pale yellow; the flesh is also yellow and fully freestone. Its flavor is bland or mediocre. The fruit damages easily in handling because of its thin, tender skin. The tree is highly susceptible to many diseases and is often short-lived.

**Harmony** (August 19) produces large, round fruit. The skin color is dull orange with dark red cheek. The flesh is yellow at the apex end, changing to bright red-orange at the stem end. It's firm and juicy with a distinct aroma and a vinous flavor.

The tree is small to medium in size and a consistently heavy bearer in Scholls, Oregon—but in Salem, Oregon, it has poor fruit set and produces a vigorous tree!

**Earlihale** (August 20) produces very large fruit that have dark red skins. The flesh is yellow, firm, freestone, with good flavor, but the fruit tend to crack. The tree requires a pollinizer and is susceptible to bacterial blight.

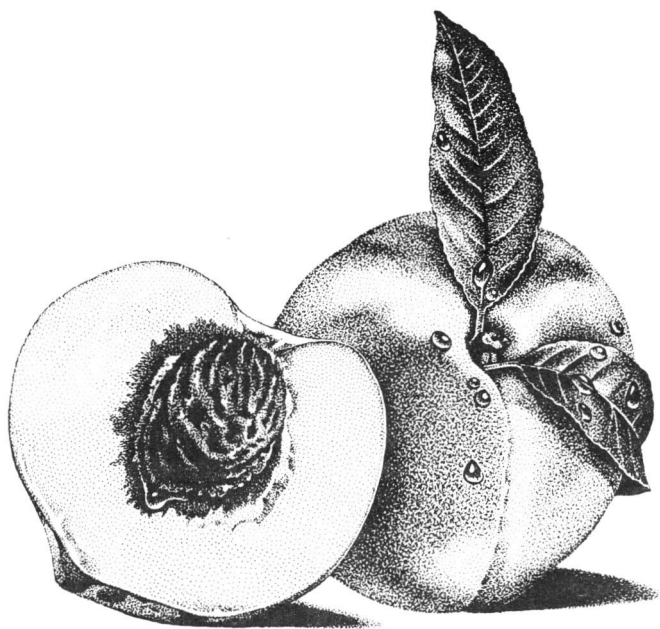
**Suncrest** (August 20). The fruit are large, round, firm, and attractively colored red on yellow. The flesh is firm, melting, freestone, with a good texture and flavor.

**Loring** (August 21) produces large yellow fruit that aren't as attractive as the red varieties. The flesh is also yellow with red at the pit, freestone, and has a very good flavor. Loring is a reliable bearer and a satisfactory canner, although it's soft and an Elberta-type.

**Glohaven** (August 22) has large, round fruit, with a skin color that is mostly red over deep yellow. The flesh is clear yellow with almost no red in the pit cavity. The fruit are firm and freestone, resist browning, can and freeze well, and remain on the tree when mature.

**Redglobe** (August 23) is only grown to a very limited extent in the Willamette Valley. This variety produces medium to large fruit with bright red skins. The flesh is yellow with red around the pit, and the pit is easily removed. The fruit are firm, melting, freestone, and good canned or frozen. However, Redglobe's fresh eating quality is poor (it's not very sweet). After maturity, the fruit continues to hang on the tree. Growers report that there are two strains of this variety available.

**Veteran** (August 28). Because of its reliable productivity, this variety has become the principal peach of western



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### Use pesticides safely!

- **Wear** protective clothing and safety devices as recommended on the label. **Bathe or shower** after each use.
  - **Read** the pesticide label—even if you've used the pesticide before. **Follow closely** the instructions on the label (and any other directions you have).
  - **Be cautious** when you apply insecticides. **Know** your legal responsibility as a pesticide applicator. You may be liable for injury or damage resulting from pesticide use.
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Oregon. The fruit are medium to large-sized and round-oblate in shape. The skin is yellow with very little red coloring; the flesh is yellow, soft, and semifreestone to freestone. It peels easily without scalding and has a rich flavor when canned, but its fresh eating quality is only fair. These Elberta-type fruit tend to drop before ripening and must be moved quickly because they show bruises easily. The tree is vigorous and highly productive. Veteran is said to be less susceptible to diseases than Early Elberta.

**Flamecrest** (September 4). The fruit are large, round, and bright red. The flesh is yellow, freestone, slow to soften, and has a good flavor. It's an excellent peach that's considered prettier than Suncrest.

**Bisco** (September 9) produces fruit that are medium to large in size with a red over yellow skin color. The flesh is deep yellow to orange with a fine to melting texture and a good flavor. It is freestone, more resistant to browning than Elberta, and remains on the tree once mature. Bisco is favored by some growers as a filler between Flamecrest and Elberta.

**Early Elberta** (September 10) is also known as Improved Elberta, Gleason Elberta, Lemon Elberta, and Stark Early Elberta. Don't confuse Early Elberta with July Elberta, as it's quite different. Early Elberta is also different from the standard Elberta, which is seldom grown in Oregon because it matures too late (Early Elberta has a rounder shape and less fuzz, and is a brighter golden color than Elberta).

The flesh is yellow, firm, freestone, and resists bruising. It's good fresh, canned, or frozen, and it has a tangy flavor that's better than Elberta's. Early Elberta has name familiarity,

and many customers ask for it; yet many of the newer introductions have a better appearance. Early Elberta won't compete well with the redder varieties. It's a good producer, but it tends to drop fruit just before maturity. It matures so late that early rains increase the chance of brown rot. Substantial losses also occur from fruit drop during windstorms.

**J. H. Hale** (September 20) is grown occasionally in the Willamette Valley, but it's a very unreliable bearer, and it matures so late that it sometimes fails to ripen. Like Earlhale, it requires a pollinizer.

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**This publication** was prepared by Robert L. Stebbins, Extension horticulture specialist, and Susan M. Bell, research assistant, Department of Horticulture, Oregon State University. It revises and replaces Fact Sheet 208. The authors are indebted to the late Mr. Mainard F. Saxton, of Scholls, Oregon, for sharing with them his extensive knowledge of the performance of peach varieties.

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