Peachy Keen on Peaches!

By Therese Gustin

No other fruit has as much going for it as the peach- a luscious texture, intoxicating aroma, delectable flavor that all combine into the ultimate moment as the juices trickle down your chin when you sink your teeth into the tender sweetness.

I adore a sweet and juicy peach on a warm summer's day. I enjoy it even more when I can pluck it from a tree located in the private orchard I like to call my backyard. Yes, to answer the question so many are asking, you can grow luscious peaches in the backyards of the Willamette Valley. For years we had our 'Frost' peach tree planted in a container on our deck right next to our columnar apple. It was last fall that I decided to relocate it to the corner of my garden. My once little peach tree was outgrowing its container and beginning to take up more space than I had set aside for it. I kept bumping into the poor thing and knocking off the immature peaches! And sadly, by the time it was time to harvest the sweet fruits, I had already lost half of the crop!

To grow peaches in the cool and wet climate of the Pacific Northwest you will most likely have to take a couple of extra steps to prevent diseases. In particular, a disease called "Peach Leaf Curl" which loves to spread with the presence of two conditions: when the branches are wet for more than two days in a row and when temperatures are less than 61 degrees. That pretty much describes spring in the Northwest! Symptoms of Peach Leaf Curl make their appearance in the spring as curled, distorted and reddened leaves. As the disease progresses thickened areas on the leaves will develop and turn yellowish-gray with a velvety texture. These spots are the spores of infection, just itching to spread their filthy fingers to healthy leaves.

If you don't notice the infected leaves until spring, it's unfortunately too late for control this year. Your only option at this point is to remove and destroy infected leaves. The best way to prevent and control Peach Leaf Curl is with a round of copper spray in the fall after the leaves drop. A second spray of copper should be applied in late January before bud break. As with applying all pesticides, it is crucial to always follow the label. If you don't spray, the disease can reduce the fruit production of your peach tree and stunt and kill its shoots. After a few years of untreated infection, it can even kill the tree.

If you find that spraying isn't your thing, ripe juicy peaches are always available for you at your local farmer's market. Bauman Farms, located in Gervais, and French Prairie Gardens in St. Paul also carry a large selection

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of different varieties of peaches each year.

You can delight in wonderfully fresh peaches from mid-July through mid- to late September. But don't let your enjoyment of these delicious peaches end there! You can extend the fresh peach taste all winter by canning or freezing some of them this summer.

Peach Cobbler

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

4 cups sliced fresh peaches
½ cup packed brown sugar
4 teaspoons cornstarch
¼ teaspoon ground mace or nutmeg
½ cup water
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon butter or margarine

Topping:

1 cup all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup butter or margarine
1 slightly beaten egg
¼ cup milk
Ice cream

For peach filling: In a medium saucepan combine, brown sugar, cornstarch and mace or nutmeg. Add ½ cup of water. Cook and stir 'til thickened and bubbly. Add sliced fresh peaches, lemon juice and 1 Tablespoon of butter or margarine. Heat through. Set aside and keep warm.

For biscuit topper: thoroughly stir together flour, granulated sugar, baking powder and salt. Cut in the butter 'til mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Combine beaten egg and milk; add all at once to dry ingredients, stirring just to moisten. Turn hot fruit filling into an 8 x 1 ½ inch round baking dish or a 1½-quart casserole. Immediately spoon on biscuit topper in 8 mounds. Bake in a 400-degree oven about 20 minutes. Serve warm with ice cream. Makes 6 servings.