

Peach pruning

In this country it makes sense to grow peaches or nectarines against a warm wall, trained as a fan. They need regular pruning to produce the young wood that will carry the fruit.

To train a peach on a wall or fence you need to provide support wires spaced 25cm apart, and extending to 200cm or more high. Fix the wires 15cm away from the wall - use wooden blocks as spacers - and fit straining bolts to keep them taut.

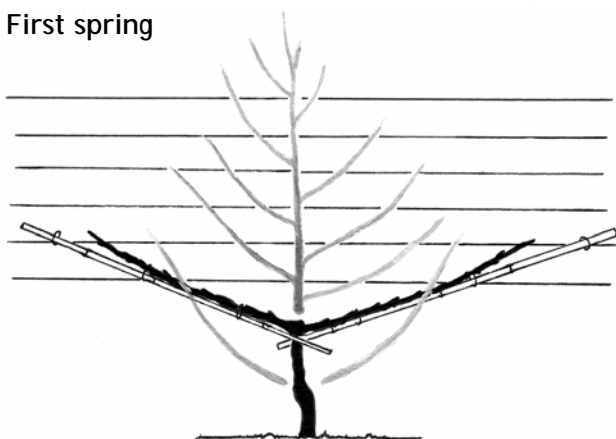
If you buy a part-trained tree, look for a well-balanced shape with widely angled branches and little or no die-back. Alternatively start with a well-grown one-year-old tree, or maiden, which should be at least 1.5m tall with a dozen or so side-branches. The best time to

plant is between October and November or February and March.

Peaches should be pruned when growing or just before growth starts in early spring. If pruned in winter they are very susceptible to dieback and the risk of infection by silverleaf disease is greater.

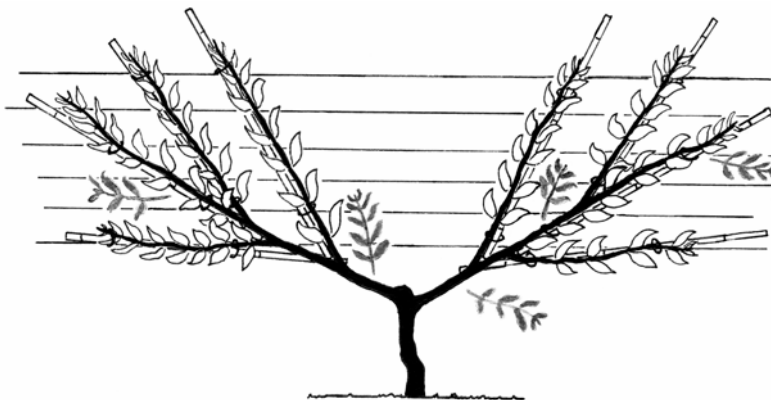
To train a fan peach or nectarine

First spring



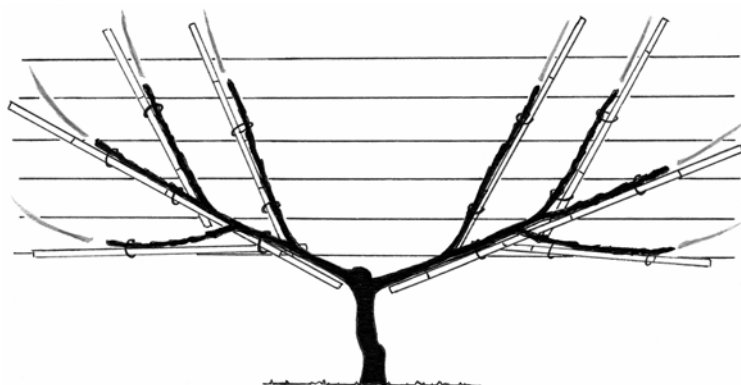
Choose two strong side-shoots on either side of the main stem about 60cm from the ground. Cut back the main stem to just above the higher of the two branches. Also remove any branches below these two. Fix canes to the wires at an angle of 20° and tie the two branches to the canes.

First summer



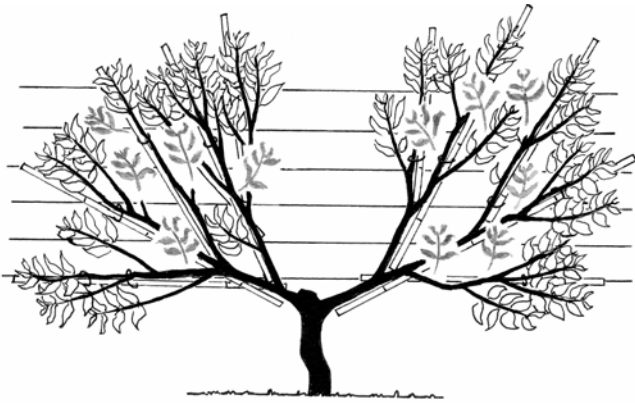
On each main branch, select three strong side-shoots, two growing upwards about 30cm and 60cm from the trunk, and one about half-way between the two, growing downwards. Tie at an angle between 30° and 45° to the main branch. Either tie direct to the wires, or to canes. Prune off other shoots to the main stem.

Second spring



Shorten the main branches and side branches to 45 to 60cm in length.

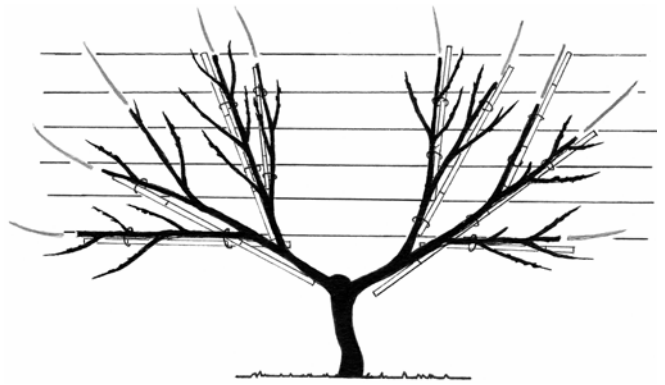
Second summer



Remove any shoots that are growing directly towards or directly away from the wall. If necessary, thin the remaining new shoots so they are about 10cm apart. Tie these in to extend and fill in the framework of the fan.

Shorten all the main framework branches by half if they are very vigorous, otherwise by a third. Cut

Third spring and summer



to a downward facing bud or a shoot on the lower side of the branch.

Third summer Repeat instructions from the second summer. If any fruit are forming, thin them to 25cm apart.



Fourth and subsequent springs

Take each branch in turn and, as the buds start to break, remove any shoots growing directly towards or away from the wall. Select two developing shoots to retain at the base of the previous year's growth, to provide a replacement and a spare for next year. Thin out any remaining young shoots to about 15cm apart.



Fourth and subsequent early summers

If there is too much leafy growth, with shoots overlapping and fruit being shaded, shorten back all the shoots except the two replacements to four leaves. If growth is already well spaced, this step can be omitted.



Fourth and subsequent late summers, after harvest

Taking each main branch in turn, choose the strongest and best placed of the two replacement shoots you left in spring. Cut back to just above this shoot. If this leaves a spare, cut this back to the main branch.

Pruning free-standing trees.

In very favourable areas of the country it is possible to grow peaches as free-standing trees. The best shape is like a goblet with a clear trunk of about 60cm, a fairly open centre and evenly spaced branches. Pruning should be carried out in spring, as growth starts. The aim is to create plenty of strong young growth which will fruit the following year.

1. Remove dead or overcrowded branches
2. Cut back older branches that have stopped fruiting to a vigorous new shoot
3. Cut back outer branches which have been pulled down by cropping to an upright branch.

