

Fresh Story: Peaches

Get to Know Your Fruits and Vegetables

It's a Peach of a Day for an O'Henry!

While enjoying your juicy peach - a variety called "O'Henry"
let's pick a few peachy facts...

We grow on trees 3 to 5m tall. Our trees bear fruit at 2 to 3 years and will live only 10 to 20 years.

Planting our trees together, in groups called **orchards**, makes it easier to care for and harvest our fruit.

Scientific name = **Prunus persica**

The BC peach harvest begins in late summer. We're a delicate fruit that bruises easily, so each one of us is carefully picked by hand.

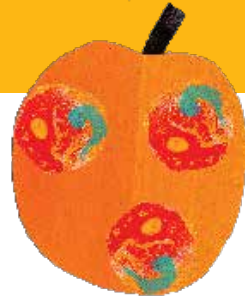
We're a **stone fruit**. Related to cherries, nectarines, plums and apricots, we all have a single seed tucked into a protective layer called a **pit**.

Our fuzzy outer skin is edible but can be easily peeled off when we're ripe.

Peaches on the top and outside of the tree will ripen 5 to 10 days before fruit on the shadier inside part.

We are not all one colour. As we ripen from green, the part facing the sun turns a reddish blush (a bit like a sunburn) and the part not exposed to sun turns yellow.

Every peach has a pointed, furrowed, egg-shaped pit in the middle that comes away easily (Freestone), or is difficult to remove (Clingstone). That rock-hard, wrinkly shell is protecting a tiny seed hidden inside that looks like an almond (don't eat it though - it contains 'cyanide' which might give you a stomach ache). From each pit a new peach plant can grow.



Peach or Nectarine?

Although they are from the same genetic family, peaches and nectarines don't really taste, smell and look the same. Peaches have a velvety layer on their skin called 'peach fuzz' while nectarines have a smooth outer skin. While nectarines grow on their own trees, they're so closely related, that nectarines can be grown on a peach tree.



A History of Peaches

Peaches first cultivated in China over 2,000 years ago → taken to Persia (Iran) along old silk routes → ancient Roman frescoes depict people eating peaches → Spanish explorers bring fruit seeds to North America in the 1500s → first peaches planted in BC in the 1800's → BC students eat fresh peaches in their classroom in 2011

Most of our BC peaches are grown on orchards in the southern areas of the Okanagan, Similkameen and Kootenay valleys. **Let's take a look at the history of this important growing region...**

The first non-natives in British Columbia were fur traders of the Hudson Bay Company setting up trading posts along rivers and lakes in the early 1800's. The river valleys used as trading routes also had the best conditions for growing crops. Early farmers found the dry, mild climate of Southern BC excellent for planting the fruit seeds they brought from Europe.

The gold rush of the 1800's brought prospectors willing to pay good prices for fresh fruit to the interior region. Apples, BC's first fruit crop, grew so well that farmers planted pear, peach and plum trees. Word spread and fresh fruit soon became the new gold. By the late 1800's, the wide-open cattle ranges were soon transformed into neat rows of orchards. Forts and outposts grew into towns named Peachland, Summerland and Kelowna.

Early farms of the 1800's did not look like the farms of today. There were no tractors, cars, telephones, or even electricity. In those days farmers used 'horsepower' to do all the plowing and heavy work.

Can you guess how Peachland got its name?

After visiting a local orchard J.M. Robinson, the town's founder, proclaimed 'This is absolutely a miracle to have peaches so far north into Canada.' And so he named his town Peachland.

EARLY FRUIT FARMER'S CHECKLIST

- ✓ Light, sandy, well-drained soil, ideally in a low-lying valley
- ✓ Lots of sun, some rain
- ✓ Moderate climate – not too hot, not too cold
- ✓ Level, or slightly sloped ground for planting orchards
- ✓ Workers to pick the fruit
- ✓ A market (peaches ripen quickly and need to be shipped fresh)

Let's make up some of our own fun names for fruit-growing towns...

