

# SELECTING AND HANDLING YOUNG TREES

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June-budded trees are the most commonly planted peach trees in the Southeast. Nurseries produce these trees by fall seeding of desirable under-stock seed. Scions are T-budded from late May through mid-June; buds are forced two to three weeks later. Salable trees are dug in late fall or early winter. Because trees are propagated early in the season, peach growers should place tree orders early to ensure availability. Growers should purchase trees from reputable sources and deal with nurseries that use seed and scion sources annually tested for key viruses. Also seek assurances of true-to-name varieties on recommended rootstocks free of nematodes, insects, and diseases before you decide on a source. Trees should be grown in soil free of nematodes.

The primary rootstocks recommended for use in the Southeast are Guardian, Halford, Lovell, and Nemaguard. Guardian, which has shown to give better survival and growth in a short-life site, is becoming increasingly popular. Halford has performed as well as Lovell and is more available than Lovell. Nemaguard is cold sensitive; it is only appropriate in the warmest southeastern production areas. Nemaguard should be planted to control damage from Southern (*Meloidogyne incognita*) or Javanese (*M. javanica*) root-knot nematodes on land new to peaches in areas not subject to frequent damaging winters. For additional information on these rootstocks, refer to the [nematode](#) and [peach tree short life](#) chapters.

When the trees arrive from the nursery, open the bundles immediately to prevent heat buildup. Examine the roots thoroughly. If there are knots or galls on any of the tree roots, report the matter to your nursery and ask your county extension agent to have the galled roots examined by a diagnostician. These abnormalities are probably due to root-knot nematodes or crown gall. If trees with crown gall or root-knot infections are planted, you may experience some initial tree loss and subsequent poor tree growth and performance. In addition, you are infesting your land with two noxious parasites. Root-knot nematodes will be very difficult and expensive to control later. Crown gall cannot be controlled later and the land will be permanently infested.

Root systems of trees arriving from the nursery should be moist. If drying out has occurred, notify the nursery immediately as to the condition of the trees upon arrival. Some compensation may be due should the trees not survive. Soak the root systems in water from 12 to 24 hours in an attempt to revitalize them.

After thoroughly examining the trees, take great care to keep them in good condition until they are planted. It is most important to keep the root system moist and cool at all times. Banking in a moist medium or wrapping in wet sacks is recommended if planting will be done immediately.

If it is not possible to plant the trees immediately, place them in cold storage at 35° to 40°F. Growers may want to pre-plant dip the trees to control peach leaf curl (see current [peach IPM guide](#)) before placing them in storage. Following dipping, repack the trees in nursery shipping containers or place them in bins. If using bins, put two to four inches of pine bark, green pine shavings, or green pine sawdust in the bottom of the bin. Then pack the bin with bundles of trees in an upright position (only one variety in a bin for ease of locating trees) and fill in around the trees with any of the above-mentioned pine materials. Then, as planting time arrives, trees will be ready to go to the field in the bin.

Where cold storage is not available, the trees should be “heeled in” outdoors. Heeling in means laying the trees on the side of a trench (roots in the trench) in a sloping position with the tops of the trees pointing toward the southwest to reduce trunk heating from the sun and covering their roots with soil. The soil should be packed tightly around the roots, eliminating air pockets. The “heel yard” should be pre-tested for nematodes before using and fumigated if tests reveal the presence of nematodes. Your county extension agent can assist you with nematode sampling and will make recommendations if fumigation is necessary.