

Peaches



In 2022, the United States produced over 625,000 tons of peaches on about 75,000 acres of land. While Illinois isn't the most common place to find peaches, there are about 1,470 acres dedicated to peach production across the state.

Peaches are grown throughout the United States in areas with the correct growing conditions. The number one producer of peaches is California. They produce over 45% of the total peaches in the United States. Peaches grow on trees in orchards.



Illinois classifies peaches into two categories: freestone and clingstone. Freestone peaches make up about 90% of Illinois' peaches. Freestone peaches are soft and the pit falls right out when you cut it. These peaches are the ones you will likely find at the grocery store or farmers market. Clingstone peaches have a pit that stays attached to the inside of the peach, making it hard to remove. Most often these peaches are canned or frozen.



Globally, there are more than 2,000 different varieties of peaches. In Illinois, yellow fleshed varieties such as Harbelle, Redhaven, Comanche, Golden Jubilee, Madison, or Cresthaven are most common. Peaches can be eaten fresh or baked. Some common treats made with peaches are cobbler, pies, ice cream, and jams.



Meet the Weigel Family

Sharecropper Farms | Golden Eagle, IL



Tell us about your farm.

The Weigels settled in Calhoun County, Illinois, in the early 1860s. Jacob Weigel built the homestead which Keith lives in today, making him the fifth generation to live there. We have been in the orchard business since Henry Weigel (Jacob's son) had apples and peaches. Today the farm/orchard is operated by Ron, Keith, and Kyle. Kyle is the sixth generation of this family to run the farm. We currently have about 100+ acres of peach trees. We are a wholesale only orchard, meaning we do not sell by the pound, or peck (12-14 pounds), or half peck (6-7 pounds).

What are the biggest challenges to growing peaches in Illinois?

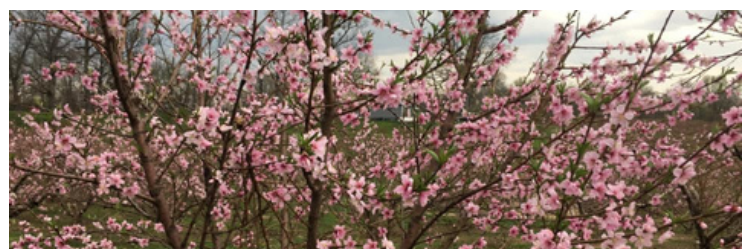
The single biggest challenge is the weather. We are always concerned about hard winter freezes, and late spring frost that can kill the buds or blooms. We also worry about too much or too little rain, and the fear of a hailstorm when the fruit is set. A hailstorm on any fruit crop is devastating. Other challenges include the cost of inputs (labor, boxes, fertilizer).

How do you harvest your peaches?

Peaches are a very delicate fruit that must be picked by hand. We strive to pick a firm peach that will not bruise, but yet have a high sugar content for that sweet Calhoun peach taste.

How do you care for the peach trees in the off-season?

Our year begins in late February/early March pruning the trees. This allows better light into the tree to color the fruit and better air flow through the trees when they are full with leaves. Spraying begins mid-March, followed by fertilizing mid-April. Mowing the orchard floor begins as soon as grass begins to grow and continues all summer.



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