

Peaches in Hawai'i?

Alton Arakaki, CTAHR Extension Agent, Moloka'i



2013 Moloka'i Peaches

Photo: Alton Arakaki

Ever thought about growing peaches in Hawai'i? If you read the only CTAHR publication on growing peaches in the islands by Warren Yee in 1973, you would think twice about growing them here. In Yee's bulletin he cited several reasons for peaches not growing well in Hawai'i. At the top of the list were the high chilling requirements, number of hours below 45° F, reduced number of available varieties, warm temperatures, and fruit damage caused by fruit flies. However since 1973, researchers at University of Florida and Texas A&M have developed peach varieties that have produced fruits in warmer areas like Mexico and Thailand. And in the area of recent fruit fly management technologies, CTAHR has developed alternatives that yield good fruit fly control results.

In 2010, with the guidance of peach experts Dr. Dave Byrne, Peach Breeder, Texas A&M and Mr. Tim Gerdtts of Burchell Nursery, Fowler, CA., a low-chill peach variety trial was installed at CTAHR's Moloka'i Applied Research and Demonstration Farm. In 2012 and 2013 the relatively young low-chill peach trees fruited under no-chill hours below 45° F growing conditions.



Photo: Jari Sugano

With the support of CTAHR, a Statewide low-chill peach variety trial is underway with plantings of four low-chill varieties, *Tropic Snow*, *Tropic Beauty*, *Tropic Prince* and *Tropic Sweet*, all publicly available varieties, at 50 cooperator and CTAHR sites. Extension Agents and cooperators will be monitoring and recording the growth characteristics and productivity of the varieties. Fruit quality will also be evaluated. In the coming years we hope to learn more about growing a deciduous fruit tree in tropical climates. But because Hawai'i has many growing micro-climates, we hope to find

locations most suited to grow peaches. Hopefully it will be sites where tropical fruits such as mango and papaya don't do well, fleshy peaches will be good substitutes.

Most people in Hawai'i, including CTAHR's Extension Agents, are familiar with growing tropical fruit trees that stay green all year round. However deciduous fruit trees are different in growth habits and production management requirements. For instance low-chill peaches will defoliate like their high chill mainland cousins and require pruning and fruit thinning at the right time to optimize fruit yield. As part of CTAHR's support of the statewide peach variety trial, a train the trainer workshop for Extension Agents was held in Kamuela, Hawai'i, at the Mealani and Lalamilo Experiment Stations. Mr. Tim Gerdts conducted the heavy hands-on training with the peach trees growing at both sites. He covered variety trial data collection, fruit sizing, tree girdling, fruit thinning, tree pruning and many other areas Agents will need to learn, including bird management. He provided example tools used for pruning and girdling trees and fruit sizing. With his commercial peach production background and knowledge, he will continue to be a valuable resource for extension agents and cooperators in the project. Since the training, agents have been visiting cooperators to advise them on growing peaches and conducting hands-on pruning training on the little more than a year old peach trees to begin selecting and establishing the important scaffold branches on the trees. For the next two years of the project, agents and cooperators will be focused on raising healthy peach trees at the trial sites and to determine if the deciduous trees will behave in a predictable seasonal growth pattern.



Photo: Jensen Uyeda



Photo: Jensen Uyeda

For more information about CTAHR's low-chill peach variety trials, contact the following extension agents:

- ▶ Hawai'i Island - Russell Nagata (russelln@hawaii.edu) and Sharon Motomura (smotomur@hawaii.edu)
- ▶ Maui - Robin Shimabuku (shimabukur@ctahr.hawaii.edu)
- ▶ Moloka'i and Lana'i - Alton Arakaki (arakakia@ctahr.hawaii.edu)
- ▶ O'ahu - Jari Sugano (suganoj@ctahr.hawaii.edu) and Jensen Uyeda (juyeda@hawaii.edu)

Article content is the sole responsibility of the author. For more information about this article, contact Alton Arakaki, email: arakakia@ctahr.hawaii.edu.