



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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TENNESSEE'S BIG PEACH CROP TAKING ITS TIME THIS SUMMER

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Tennessee's summer has been refreshingly mild so far, making it easy just to hang around outdoors, lingering, enjoying the season. Apparently, the weather has the same effect on one of the state's favorite crops, too: Tennessee peaches are also just hanging around, lingering on their trees longer than usual.

"We have a fantastic peach crop this year," says Pamela Bartholomew, agritourism coordinator for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, "but all the varieties are ripening more slowly than usual because of the relatively cool summer."

"Peaches need a certain amount of sun and heat to ripen and get sweet, and it's just taking a little longer this year for that process to complete itself," says Bartholomew. "In the meantime, all these timely rains have continued to fall over much of the state, and those peaches just keep getting bigger."

"What this means for all of us is that we have more time to go out to some peach orchards and take advantage of more varieties, for a longer season, than anybody would have anticipated," says Bartholomew. "Peaches that ordinarily would be past their season are still available. Should the weather turn hot this month, as it usually does, the peach crop will respond and the later varieties will be literally pulling tree branches to the ground with their weight."

Peach varieties blossom, grow and ripen on different timetables. Early peaches are typically available in late June, and other varieties follow throughout the summer right through August. Because of Tennessee's wide ranging topography and temperatures, West Tennessee peaches tend to ripen first and East Tennessee peaches ripen last.

The peach crop in Tennessee depends in large part on the timing of spring frosts. If a heavy killing frost falls on peach trees in bloom or with tiny peaches just beginning to show, the crop is decimated. Bartholomew says this risk is part of what makes local peaches so highly anticipated and prized.

"There's really no substitute for a peach left to ripen completely on the tree for maximum flavor, and any peach that has to sit in a basket and travel any distance simply can't be

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left on the tree that long," says Bartholomew. "To get this delicate fruit at its best, go out and pick it for yourself – and imagine how much fun that can be in the nice weather we've been having! Everybody in the family would enjoy it."

Tennessee peach orchards dot the state, and a county by county listing of pick-your-own peach orchards is available at www.picktnproducts.org. "This is definitely the year to head out to a local orchard," says Bartholomew; "just be sure to call ahead to confirm availability and hours of operation. Weather conditions can close down an orchard or any farm."

"It's only August," says Bartholomew. "This year, that means you still have most of the season to get out and pick yourself some of the best peaches you'll ever taste."

For more information about local farms, fruits and vegetables, call 615-837-5160 or visit www.picktnproducts.org.

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