



LIFE/TRAVEL

Home/Gardening

Stop birds from pecking your peaches

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Those beautiful peaches on your tree are almost ripe. Tomorrow, you'll pick them. But when you go out with your peach basket, devastation awaits: Each golden-rose fruit has been devoured, leaving little but the pit.

We love homegrown peaches. Unfortunately, so do birds.

Because peaches don't ripen once picked, you must wait until they are ready before you pick them. That means birds might get there before you.

To learn ways to protect fruit such as peaches, pears and plums from being pecked, we talked to the experts: fruit farmers.

Two orchard owners recommended the same preventive: nets over the trees. Dale Ham, owner of Ham's Orchards in Terrell, said he had heard that nets kept the birds from getting at the fruit.

Heard? He didn't use nets?

Neither he nor Lafreita Hutton of Hutton Fruit Farm near Weatherford used nets, because the cost of covering an orchard to keep out birds would be prohibitive. "When you have an orchard, they are going to get their share," Ms. Hutton said.

But both thought nets would be fine for homeowners who have only a few trees.

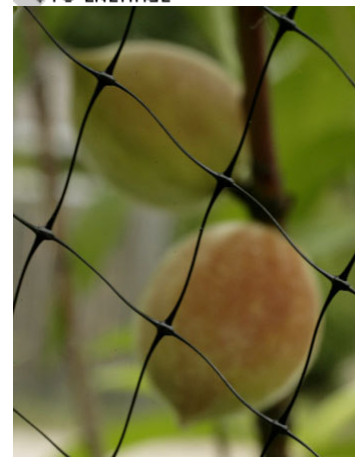
Hutton Fruit Farm had tried devices that boom like cannons, Ms. Hutton said. Of course, the noise wouldn't go over well in the city. She also said that a scarecrow would be worth trying.

If you try a net, don't just drape it over the tree. Birds could fly under it to get at the fruit. Tie the net to the trunk so there is no opening to exploit.

Not all nurseries carry nets. We found one at Calloway's on Greenville Avenue. The 14-by-14-foot net is \$9.99.

The master gardeners at the Texas Cooperative Extension Help Desk also said that nets seemed to be the top choice. They had other suggestions, as well. Noise, such as turning on a radio, seems to work, at least for a while, as do shiny objects that reflect light, scaring away the birds. Aluminum pie pans or Mylar reflective

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Netting may be the best way to keep birds from eating ripe peaches off trees.

tape are worth trying. Some people put paper sacks over the fruit.

We found a company named Bird-X (www.Bird-x.com) that caters to farmers and others who need large-scale critter-repelling. It did have some products that homeowners might be able to adapt.

One was Critterblaster Pro, essentially a sound system with speakers that can be programmed. "Digital harassment sounds irritate animals and bird pests so they leave – for good!" says the site.

Our favorite was Terror-Eyes Bird Repeller. It's a 2-foot hanging ball with "menacing, moving eyes on front and back that strikes fear in birds!" It's \$45.

This year, I tied compact discs to my peach tree and to other nearby trees, in hopes reflected light will scare the birds. It has worked, so far. Of course, the birds are probably just waiting for the peaches to ripen.