

**2017 ACORN Conference & Trade Show
Best Western Glengarry - Truro, NS**

Workshop Title: Peaches in Nova Scotia - Challenges and Opportunities

Presenter: Kevin Graham, Oakview Farm

Executive Summary: Given the right climate and attentive care, a successful non-organic peach crop can be produced and marketed in Nova Scotia.

Oakview is a mixed farm with livestock, fruit, u-pick, market, etc.

Minas Basin in Kingsport, Nova Scotia - 30 acres were purchased in 1996. Kevin comes from a farming and fishing family - in Centreville since the 1950's. The farm is not organic - they use as little chemicals as possible (more on that to follow). He has no formal training, but moved to and fell in love with the area, and bought their first farm in the 1970's, and learned the ropes from mentors and hands on experience.

They noticed a warming climate and thought, why not get in to peaches?!

First 3 years - graced with very dry period. No spray - no problems.

4th-5th years - 2 hectares, the whole crop rotted in 2 days.

The farm is on a south facing slope; they grow 3 varieties (garnet beauty, early red haven, red haven) and together they ripen over about 4-6 weeks.

- Historically peach trees have a productive 7 year life span in Nova Scotia.
- However they can continue to produce less reliably for 25 years.
- Trees were purchased locally; propagated in Michigan.
- They come into production quickly: 2-3 years.
- Can stand to -25C, anything below that and the trees will die.
- They grow best in sandy loam, well-drained soil, with a pH of 6.5-7.

New planting in 2017 - should have maybe planted earlier, as production is gradually decreasing and disease is gradually increasing gradually in older stock

Orchard care:

- Developed a spray program after incidence of brown rot: start with synthetics when the tree is still dormant through to blossom (Bravo - registered chemical fungicide for leaf curl); pristine - only organic sprays are used after fruit is set (sulphur based organic fungicide, etc.).
- Chemical Fertilize early - 17-17-17 (N-P-K).
- Pruning in spring, not in the winter as it can cause damage; keep trees trimmed so that fruit bearing branches are low to the ground - produce fruit in their 2nd year.

- Thinning fruit - labour intensive (and nerve wracking!) by hand into July when fruit is 1-1.5" in diameter; fruit will naturally set as close as grapes - separate out to about 6" apart; if peaches don't get thinned, the consequence is small fruit and limb breakage.

Issues and Disease:

- Soil compaction issue: a numbered variety of peach trees were planted into compacted soil; soil pathogen (fungus). Though negatively affected, the trees have been left in place and used as a travel way - trees have bounced back to some degree.
- Peach Leaf Curl: can defoliate entire tree (red, shiny, lumpy appearance) - lime sulphur organic alternative; treat twice.
- Bacterial canker: associated with brown rot and injured trees. Old plum varieties around property has brought the bacteria in. Sappy weep at damaged areas, reddish. Very similar to black knot. Can be pruned out or culled.
- Peach brown rot: very wet summer - sprayed more this year than any other; 13 applications. Going into fall; 2 major rain events in the Annapolis Valley at the end of August - back to back weeks; neglected sprays on late crop and lost 90%.
- Peach scab: ugly but fine. Doesn't rot the fruit but is a deterrent to sales.

Harvest & Storage:

- Stretch harvest as long as possible - start picking with some yellow, firm is okay, but green is not. Spot pick and get into storage ASAP to cool. Repeat every couple of days - there is about a 10 day window from when it starts to yellow on the tree to when it is ripe on the tree.
- Fruit ripens quickly in hot temps.
- Store up to 6 weeks at temp 2-4C.
- FarmWorks (NS) offers funding for on-farm projects; helped to fund Oakview Farm's cold storage.

Marketing:

- Direct sales: u-pick, Halifax farm market.
- Wholesale (Sobeys, Stirlings, a couple other smaller markets):
 - Biggest crop is typically 500-600 bushels (there is not a lot of money to be made selling 3L baskets wholesale).
 - There are more orchards, and so sales are more competitive in last 5-10 years.
 - Kevin is scaling back to reduce/eliminate wholesale and focus on direct market sales.

- With sales through Scotian Gold, there is no export reported that is happening out of province (except Stirlings to Moncton/Saint John?).

Commercial Peach Production in NS:

- Concentrated in Annapolis Valley (climate); Scotian Gold producers represent 12 hectares between all of their producers; there are about 20 hectares total in Nova Scotia.
- Perhaps some over-production? Domestic market may be saturated.

Q - Have you looked into value-add?

A - Have not; sell bulk to others for value-add processing.

Q - Pruning techniques?

A - Trees have gotten too tall (15'); bottom limbs tend to die off. Prune limbs coming out at 45 degree angle; look to have 6 main limbs and keep centre open. Trim dead/diseased wood. Encourage limbs to stay down (6-8' high for easy reach/harvest). Over-pruning drives trees into vegetative growth. Only get fruit on 2nd year wood.

Q - Is there a way on a smaller scale (ie 6 trees) to push boundaries of climate, insulate roots to mimic warmer climate?

A - You need to worry more about the tree, not its roots. Some have planted trees in apple bins and moved them inside through the winter. Fruit tastes different (not as good?)! But the practice does offer early fruit.

Q - Spray technique?

A - Synthetic pre-bloom, organic fungicides post-bloom. Strawberries & peaches take in fungicides very easily - porous, soft skin.

Q - Harvest - different in flavour if peach is left to ripen on tree?

A - Yes - better flavour if ripened on the tree.

Q - Do you mulch around trees?

A - No, but now and leave the trimmings. Grass competition is not significant once trees are established with a good trunk. Keep grass away when the trees are young.

Q - Can peaches be grown on trellis?

A - Unsure, haven't see it being done, but likely a possibility. Need to maintain 2nd year wood.

Q - On the eastern shore of Nova Scotia, we have no disease, no rot; concerned about bringing in new stock that may be diseased.

A - Go with certified nursery (Krouse in Carlisle, ON).