

Stone Fruit Demonstration and Teaching Orchard

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Historically, stone fruit production in Florida has been a successful endeavor, with a majority of the acreage centered in North Florida. Interest in farm diversification and local crop production has brought peach production to the forefront, and acreage in the state has increased to approximately 1,000 acres. Peach production has the potential to increase farm profitability as part of a diversified crop portfolio, as growers in the state receive approximately two and a half times the amount per pound currently received in other Southeastern U.S. states. The UF stone fruit breeding program continues to release low-chill peach, nectarine and plum varieties that can be grown throughout Florida. The stone fruit demonstration and teaching orchard at the Florida Partnership for Water, Agriculture and Community Sustainability at Hastings serves as a demonstration and education orchard. The orchard was planted in September 2009, and the trees have been irrigated and fertilized per UF-IFAS recommendations. The first significant yield was harvested in 2011, with a full mature crop expected in 2012. In 2010 and 2011, several trees were re-budded to establish peach and nectarine varieties. A majority of the plum varieties have been lost to deer browsing and will be replaced in 2012. Several field days are held throughout the year to educate extension personnel, commercial and dooryard growers on pruning techniques, thinning, and variety evaluation. In addition, data will be collected on bloom and harvest dates to compare with other regions in Florida, build phenological models, and increase the area covered by crop insurance.