

Growing the perfect persimmon trees

CHRIS RUSCH
Master Gardener

Question: Can persimmon trees grow successfully in our area?

Answer: Persimmon trees are small, easy to grow and already adapted to most of western Oregon. Two kinds of persimmons are grown in the west. The Native American species (*Diospyros virginiana*) is a larger tree and tolerates the cold better than the Asian species (*Diospyros kaki*). But the Asian type bears a larger and sweeter fruit than the American type.

The common American persimmon grows wild in the Eastern US and reaches as far west as the Colorado River in Texas. The fruit is an important wildlife food and is edible. Persimmon wood is very hard and nearly black. The wood from old trees has been used to make golf club heads, billiard cues and parquet flooring.

Confederate soldiers boiled persimmon seeds as a coffee substitute during the Civil War.

Diospyros means “fruit or wheat of the gods;” *virginiana* means “from Virginia.” One common name, possum wood, was given to the tree because opossums love its fruit. The common American persimmon makes excellent rootstock and is graft compatible for cultivated Asian persimmons. If you decide to plant an American persimmon, two or more varieties or seedlings of American persimmon must be planted for pollination.

The Asian persimmon is a species related to common American persimmon, but is native to Asia. On the main island of Japan, persimmon trees are found in every village, along roadsides and around farmer’s cottages.

It was introduced to the United States in mid-1800 from its native China and Japan. It has been an important fruit crop in each of those countries for hundreds of years. It can grow to about 30 feet when mature. Most Asian persimmons produce seedless fruit. Seedless fruit tends to have



Chris Rusch
Ask a Master Gardener

better eye appeal because seeded fruit that results from cross-pollination, often have darker flesh. Most Asian types are self-fertile. Look for these popular varieties:

‘Fuyu’ (Japanese) is a medium-sized, non-astringent,

self-fruitful persimmon. Fuyu, a wonderful eating type is harvested when firm. The fruit is rather flattened, orange-colored, and of high quality. Fuyu will pollinate all other varieties. Look for early ripening types like Fuyu Early, Early Jiro, and Sweet Fuyu (all picked and eaten when firm).

‘Izu’ bears medium-sized non-astringent fruit. It seems to be more cold hardy than ‘Fuyu’.

‘Tamopan’ is a moderately productive, very large, orange, flat-shaped persimmon with a distinctive ring constriction near the middle of the fruit. The tree is the most vigorous and upright of the varieties grown.

‘Eureka’ is a heavy-producing, medium-sized, flat-shaped, extremely high-quality red persimmon. The tree is relatively small and is self-fruitful.

‘Tane-nashi’ is a moderate producer, cone-shaped, orange-colored persimmon. The tree is vigorous and upright. The fruit stores well, and the tree makes an excellent landscape ornamental.

‘Hachiya’ is a large productive, cone-shaped, seedless persimmon with bright orange-red skin. The tree is upright and very vigorous. This outstanding variety makes an excellent dual-purpose, fruit-ornamental specimen.

‘Franko’ produces large, conical, gold fruit. It is one of the prettiest persimmons; the leaves turn bright red as the gold fruit ripens in the fall.

The month of January is an ideal time to plant bare-rooted persimmons. Containerized trees should be purchased in March/April to insure that the tree is leafed out and well rooted. Plant trees 15 to 20 feet apart in a sunny location.



TEXAS A&M EXTENSION

An American persimmon tree.

The soil should be a rich loam with good drainage. Do not allow the trees to stand in water. The tree has good drought tolerance, but it is important to keep your trees watered during our hot and dry summer months. Add a layer of mulch and compost as needed.

Persimmon trees usually need pruning only to remove broken or dead branches, or open up a too dense interior. Prune trees when they are young to establish a good framework. Remove suckers that shoot up from below the graft line. The tree, its leaves, and its fruit do not have to be sprayed because they have no serious insect or disease problems.

The fruit should be allowed to hang on the tree as long as possible unless varmints are an issue; then remove the fruit with a gentle pull when they develop a vibrant orange color. Knowing when to eat persimmons is the key to enjoying them. Most persimmons, except ‘Fuyu’ and ‘Izu’ are astringent and must be fully ripe and soft before eating. Persimmons are delicious whether

eaten fresh, dried, or cooked.

As a fresh fruit, they are unbelievable. The taste of a fully ripened persimmon is superb-incomparable to any other fruit. They are high in vitamin A. You can also place unripe persimmons in a box in a clean, dry place (such as a garage) for ripening.

The American and Asian persimmon are excellent fruit trees for ornamental use and make beautiful specimen trees. Few fruit trees are as attractive in landscapes as persimmons. They provide dark green foliage in the summer that turns orange/yellowish/red in the fall. The tree is a sight to behold when the leaves have fallen in autumn, displaying the bright yellow-orange fruits throughout the canopy.

Try planting two or more this year. I think they will be well suited in your orchard or home landscape.

Email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.