

# Persimmons

## Diospyros

### A Garden Guide

For thousands of years, Persimmons have been cultivated around the world. They provide valuable edible fruits and hard wood.

“Diospyros” generally translates to “divine fruit”, and this genus is within the Ebony family (Ebenaceae).



*Diospyros kaki*, Asian Persimmon, has been cultivated for over 2000 years in China. *Diospyros virginiana*, American Persimmon, has been used since prehistoric times by Native Americans, for food, wood, and medicine. It is native throughout the South, including here in WNC. American Persimmon is more cold hardy and resilient than Asian Persimmon; however, the fruit is considered to be more astringent. American Persimmons also bloom later than the Asian types.

**Pollination:** Persimmon trees are typically dioecious, meaning you'll need at least one male tree and one female tree for fruit production. American and Asian types will not pollinate each other.

**Siting:** Persimmons are tolerant of many conditions. They will produce best in 6-8 hours of direct sunlight, with fertile, moist, well-draining soil. They can tolerate clay, slopes, and part shade. As sizing can vary tremendously, check plant tags for spacing. They have a taproot and do not care much for transplanting, so it is best to plant these where you really want them.

**Soil and Planting:** Persimmon trees prefer a pH of 6.0-6.5, with moist, well-draining soil. A good soil test will tell you exactly what to add, but usually in our soils, Persimmon trees will need at least 1/3rd soil conditioner, up to 1/3rd rich composts, and perhaps lime mixed with our native clay. Applying mycorrhizae directly to the roots, just prior to planting, will improve tree resilience. Dig a hole 2-3x as wide as the pot, only as deep as the pot, plant the tree in the soil at the same height as it was in the pot or a little bit higher. Apply 2-3" of hardwood mulch to the root zone, but do not let it touch the trunk or any woody roots that might be visible.



**Fertilizing:** Many options, Espoma Tree-tone® applied in the spring is an excellent choice. Compost tea is a wonderful snack for your trees in the spring and summer.

**Watering:** Slowly, deeply, and once weekly during the first growing season. Supplemental water will be needed during dry periods - drought can compromise fruit production. Less water will be needed during rainy periods. Remember, too much or too little water can cause significant health issues.

**Organic Management:** Persimmons have very few significant disease and pest issues. If issues arise, Horticultural Oil, Neem Oil, and Bacillus thuringiensis (for caterpillars) are good options to consider.

**Wildlife:** Wildlife may be attracted to the fruits. You can plant enough that there's plenty to share. Alternatively, we do carry netting.

**Harvesting and Processing:** Astringent types may be harvested while still full of color and firm, and then sweetened off the tree (apples or bananas may be placed among the fruits post-harvest to speed up this process). Non-astringent types can be harvested while full of color and firm. They may have a deep flushed apricot hue with pink overtones. Folk wisdom says to harvest American Persimmons after a frost or freeze.

There are multiple ways to harvest Persimmons. Due to the delicate nature of the fruit, which can be prone to bruising, cutting individual fruits off the plant will ensure the least amount of damage. Leaving a little stem will allow you options for drying. However, some people will use the old fashioned method of placing a sheet beneath the canopy, and gently shaking the tree. Each fruit will then be inspected to decide what to keep, and what to leave to nature.

Persimmons are delicious whether eaten fresh, dried, or cooked. As a fresh fruit, they are unsurpassed. The taste of a fully ripe Persimmon is superb, and is incomparable to any other fruit. They can be used in sweet or savory dishes.

Persimmons can be used fresh in salads, appetizers, or as a dessert or topping, chilled or frozen. They are excellent in ice cream, with yogurt, or in smoothies. Cooked or baked, they are delicious in cakes, breads, puddings, cookies, cobblers, pies, and pastries. Persimmons also make wonderful preserves and jams.

Some people find potato ricers to be helpful for removing the seeds from the pulp.

The most common method of preservation is drying. They can be dried on a tray in the sun, tied onto long strands of cotton or garden twine in a location with good airflow, dried in an oven at low heat, or sliced and dried in an electric dryer.



Shìbǐng style is the Chinese method for drying whole fruits on large platters.



Hoshigaki style is the Japanese method of drying whole Persimmons. Harvest only orange, firm Persimmons, leaving about one and a half inches of the stem intact. Trim away the calyx (the green ruffled top,) being sure to leave the stem intact. Next, rinse the Persimmon under running water, drying it with a paper towel. Peel away the skin. Tie a foot-long length of cotton string or garden twine to the stem and hang it in a well-ventilated area for it to air dry for 1-2 months. When dried, the Persimmons should feel leathery but still pliable. The dried fruits are eaten as a snack, and incorporated into many different recipes.

Persimmon pulp may be spread on foil in a flat pan and dried into jerky; dried Persimmon pulp was a popular method with Native Americans as the dried fruit can last a very long time (the word “persimmon” comes from several words meaning “a dry fruit” in multiple Algonquian dialects).

Freezing is another popular method of preserving Persimmons. They can be peeled before freezing and frozen whole, or pureed. It is recommended to add 1/8 teaspoon of ascorbic acid to each quart of Persimmon puree. Frozen, they can safely keep for a year or more.

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