



# Home Garden Persimmons

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Many of the numerous species of persimmon can be grown in Georgia. Our native persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana*, is found from Florida north to Connecticut, west to Iowa and south to Texas. Oriental persimmons, *Diospyros kaki*, were introduced into the United States less than a hundred years ago. They are not as familiar as native persimmons, but they are superior in quality.

## Site and Soil Requirements

Native persimmons are known to be hardy to temperatures of 20-25 degrees F below zero without apparent winter injury. Thus, they can be grown in any area of Georgia. The oriental persimmon may be injured or killed below 10 degrees F. As a general rule, oriental persimmons should not be grown north of Macon. Exceptions to this rule are the oriental persimmon varieties Great Wall, Peping and Sheng grafted onto native persimmon rootstock. These are hardy to 0 degrees F.

Native persimmons grow in a wide range of soil types and are commonly found along roadsides and in abandoned fields. Oriental persimmons also tolerate a wide range of soil types once they are established. Soil moisture extremes resulting from poor drainage or drought can cause serious fruit drop, however.

## Varieties

Many native persimmons are simply seedling trees. The quality of fruit from such trees will vary. A number of native persimmons have been selected and

named and are available from some nurseries. Only by obtaining a known variety of either native or oriental persimmon from a reliable nursery will you be sure of obtaining trees with desirable fruit characteristics.

### NATIVE AND ORIENTAL PERSIMMON VARIETIES<sup>1</sup>

Variety	Characteristics
<i>Native</i>	
Even Golden	Productive, with medium sized fruit containing 3-8 seeds. Excellent quality and firmness.
John Rick	Productive, excellent flavor and firmness with 2-8 seeds.
Woolbright	Excellent flavor but soft and splits easily; productive.
Miller	Productive, flavor good with large firm fruit.
Killen	Good flavor and firm fruit. Medium sized and moderately productive.
<i>Oriental<sup>2</sup></i>	
Eureka	Heavy producer with flat-shaped, quality red fruit. Self-fruitful, making a small tree. Astringent until ripe.
Hana Fuyu	Large, round-shaped, yellow-orange fruit. Non-astringent with good quality. Moderately vigorous trees, and productive. Has performed well at Byron, Ga.
Fuyu	Medium-sized red, somewhat square-shaped fruit. Non-astringent while firm and self-fruitful.

## NATIVE AND ORIENTAL PERSIMMON VARIETIES<sup>1</sup> [CONT.]

Variety	Characteristics
Ichikikei Jiro	Productive producer of oblate-shaped fruit. Non-stringent with good quality. It will mature seedless crops. Tree is comparatively smaller than most and regulates its crop load well.
Tanenashi	Cone-shaped orange fruit without seed. Trees are vigorous and moderately productive. Fruit is astringent until ripe.
Tamopan	Large, flat-shaped orange fruit with constriction around middle. Very vigorous trees and moderately productive. Astringent until ripe.
Great Wall <sup>3</sup>	Vigorous trees with flat, small, orange-red fruit. Astringent until ripe.
Sheng <sup>3</sup>	Moderately vigorous trees with flat, large, orange-red fruit. Astringent until ripe.
Peping <sup>3</sup>	No information available on fruit.

<sup>1</sup> This information, based on sources in other parts of the midwest and south, is considered useful for growing conditions in Georgia. Should not be grown north of Macon.

<sup>2</sup> Should not be grown north of Macon.

<sup>3</sup> May be grown in the northern part of the state when grafted on *D. virginiana* rootstocks.

## Flowering and Pollination Requirements

Native persimmons are usually dioecious; that is, trees produce either male or female flowers. Only rarely are native persimmons self-pollinating. Thus, both female and male trees are usually necessary to produce a full crop.

In oriental persimmons, female, male and/or perfect flowers can be produced on the same tree. In addition, many oriental persimmons can produce fruit from unfertilized flowers (parthenocarpic fruit), though such fruit have no seed. The oriental persimmon varieties Ichikikei Jiro, Tamopan, Tanenashi and Hachiya produce quality fruit without pollination. Although fruit can be produced without pollination, heavier and more consistent crops usually result from pollination. Parthenocarpic fruit are much more prone to drop during the growing season.

Oriental persimmons can be pollinated by Fuyu or Gailey oriental varieties. Native persimmons will not cross-pollinate with oriental persimmons.

## Planting and Care

Oriental persimmons grow to a height of 20-30 feet at maturity although some varieties may stay as short as 10 feet. Native persimmons may reach a height of 30-40 feet. Within the landscape or garden, give oriental persimmons as much space to develop as you generally would for other fruit or nut trees.

Fertilize young trees with 10-10-10 in early spring and in mid-summer at the rate of 2 ounces per year of tree age. Fertilize bearing trees lightly. The fertilization normally supplied in a lawn situation is often sufficient. Excess nitrogen fertilization, however, can cause fruit drop.

In some years, trees will crop heavily resulting in a light crop the following year. This is called *biennial bearing* and is common in many fruit and nut crops. To reduce the problem, thin the fruit to 6 inches apart on oriental persimmons within a month after bloom in a year when the crop is heavy.

Minimal pruning, consisting of complete limb removal to prevent limb crossing and to remove dead or broken limbs, may be necessary. More extensive pruning may be necessary as the tree gets older to control tree size.

## Fruiting and Harvest

The fruit of native persimmons are round or oval, about the size of a plum. In most cases, the flesh is very pungent and, until soft and ripe, astringent in taste. Oriental persimmon fruit attain the size of a peach and, in general, commercial varieties are not as astringent when ripe as native persimmons.

A misconception exists that frost is required before persimmons are edible. This is incorrect and, in fact, frost will ruin immature fruit on the tree. High quality persimmons lose astringency as they ripen — often well in advance of frosts.

Persimmons continue to ripen after they are picked. Many varieties must be allowed to become fully soft ripe before they lose enough astringency to be edible. Exceptions are Fuyu and Jiro, which can be eaten green when firm with little astringency.

## Insect Pests

Native persimmons may be attacked by a number of insects; oriental persimmons are, at this time, relatively free of serious insect problems. Insect pests of persimmons include scale, persimmon psyllid, leafrolling and defoliating caterpillars, and persimmon borer.

Persimmon scale and tuliptree scale are to be expected. In unsprayed situations, scale are generally kept under control by natural parasites, predators and diseases. Spraying for other pests often releases scale from natural control. Dormant oil application shortly before bud swell should provide good control of scale.

Persimmon psyllid is a tiny, leaf feeding, aphid-like pest that causes leaf deformation. Infested leaves roll and curl up on themselves. Psyllid are often limited by natural parasites. Don't apply insecticides until after you have observed damage.

Caterpillars such as fall webworm, red-humped caterpillar and variable oak leaf caterpillar will occasionally infest persimmons. These pests also tend to be heavily parasitized, limiting their importance as pests. Insecticides are effective where damage warrants use.

Persimmon borer is a serious pest of native and oriental persimmons. It has been seen attacking oriental persimmons in Georgia, although it is known to infest both species in other states. Its larvae attack the lower trunk and tap roots. Where infestations occur, preventive insecticide treatments similar to those made for peachtree borer will be required.

Other sporadic pests of persimmons include ambrosia beetles that attack where bark is injured or sun-scalded. White latex paint minimizes the latter cause. Termites will attack young potted plants if they are weak or those heavily mulched with sawdust at transplanting. Avoiding the use of sawdust eliminates this problem.

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**Circular 784**

**Reviewed March 2009**

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