



Harvest of the Month

Persimmons



Botany

Diospyros kaki is the scientific name of the common, or Chinese, persimmon. There are other species in the genus that are grown for their fruit, mostly in other areas of Asia; but there are two species native to the United States!

The Chinese persimmon comes in two forms, astringent and non-astringent. The heart-shaped Hachiya is the most common variety of astringent persimmon. Astringent persimmons contain very high levels of soluble tannins and are unpalatable if eaten before completely softened. The non-astringent persimmon has a squat shape and is most commonly sold as Fuyu. Fuyu persimmons are not actually free of tannins but rather are far less astringent before ripening and lose more of their tannic quality sooner. Non-astringent persimmons may be consumed when still very firm and remain edible when very soft. In both cases there are many named cultivars available. In the U.S. most trees sold are grafted onto the native U.S. persimmon rootstock.

Caqui means persimmon in Spanish.

Social Sciences

The persimmon is native to China, Northeast India, and Northern Indochina. It was first cultivated in China more than 2,000 years ago, and introduced to Japan in the 7th century and to Korea in the 14th century. China, Japan and South Korea are the top producers of persimmons. The persimmon came to the United States, landing first on the West Coast, with immigrants from China and Japan in the late 1800's. California is the state that grows the most persimmons in the U.S.

Fun Fact

Persimmons are one of the most popular fruits in the countries of Nepal and Brazil.

Nutrition

Persimmons have higher levels of dietary fiber than apples! They are also antioxidant powerhouses, containing high levels of Vitamin A and C.

Persimmon Cookie Recipe

Growing Tips

Persimmon is a wonderful tree to add to the school garden, if you have enough space, as they are relatively care-free. The tree is not fussy about soil conditions, standing in overly wet soil in Winter, or dry conditions in the Summer. It has no significant pests and doesn't require yearly pruning to produce a good crop.



Harvesting

Both types of persimmons begin to ripen in the Fall but can stay on the tree well into Winter. Pick Fuyu persimmons when they are fully colored a deep orange, and are firm to the touch. You can also harvest them when they are still a bit pale to ripen indoors, or wait until they are softer and very sweet to pick them off the tree. The longer you wait the sweeter they are. They can stay on the tree even after the leaves fall off. Pick Hachiya persimmons when they are deep red-orange and soft, feeling like a water balloon when gently squeezed. You can also harvest them while still firm, and let them ripen indoors at room temperature until they become very soft.

How To Make Hoshigaki

Hoshigaki are a Japanese delicacy made by gently massaging persimmons while they air dry.

- Step 1:** Use astringent varieties such as Hachiya. Harvest fruit that is firm and still has part of the stem.
- Step 2:** Cut the top off, and then peel the skin.
- Step 3:** Cut a 24 inch length of string and tie it into a loop.
- Step 4:** Take two similarly sized fruits and tie their stems together with the string. Hang somewhere sunny with good air-flow.
- Step 5:** The first week you don't touch them. After a week has passed, begin to gently massage each persimmon every other day. After a few weeks of massaging, fructose in the fruit will begin to come to the surface, making it look like the persimmons have been dipped in powdered sugar. They are done when they have a chewy texture. Yum!

