

Food for the Gods – Candy for the Eye

Persimmons

Diospyros kaki

Obviously, we're big fans of the persimmon here at Orange County Nursery. We've been growing, *and* breeding *and* eating them since the early part of the last century so you'd probably think we're simply indulging in a little hyperbole by calling them "Food for the Gods". However, that's actually a direct translation of their Latin name *Diospyros kaki*: *Dios* means God and *Pyros* means food or grain, which is how persimmons came to be referred to as "Food for the Gods".

Persimmons have just recently gained mainstream acceptance in the US marketplace so many will be surprised by the fact that persimmons are the world's major fruit. More persimmons are consumed worldwide than any other fruit; a statistic that is not just a year old, or a decade, but one that has been true for centuries.

Easy to grow, persimmon trees typically do best in areas with moderate winters and dry summers. Japanese persimmons have a low chill requirement and are widely adaptable to a variety of soil moisture regimes. Additionally, they are generally free of most pests and diseases. This makes them an ideal choice for both the home and the commercial grower alike.

The Fruit

The fruit of the persimmon is classified as either **astrigent** or **non-astrigent**. Non-astrigent cultivars lose their tartness while still hard and can be eaten hard or soft. Astrigent cultivars must be soft or artificially treated before being consumed. The richly flavored fruit is high in cholesterol lowering fiber, carotenoids and vitamin A.

The most popular variety hands down in both the US and Asia for growing and eating is the crisp and tender '**Fuyu**' (aka '**Jiro**'). 'Fuyu' is a non-astrigent, pollination constant variety which means that it can be eaten when crisp like an apple and that the qualities of the fruit do not change whether there is a pollinator present or not. Although 'Fuyu' can be enjoyed straight from the tree, allow it to ripen a day or two and the flavor deepens and becomes even richer and more intense.

Astrigent varieties like the popular '**Hachiya**' are eaten soft. The taste is deeply sweet yet not cloying. Complex and pungent, the savory flavor of astrigent varieties holds up well in baked goods, puddings and especially ice creams.

For a more in depth look at Diospyros kaki cultivars and a list of the many varieties we grow at Orange County Nursery the descriptions written by Sixto Veyna posted on our website (www.ocnursery.com).

Abundant Beauty

Diospyros kaki was included in Garden Guru Michael Dirr's Trees & Shrubs for Warm Climates. In addition to acknowledging that it's a "good tree for the back yard garden" and that the "fruit are beautiful" Dr. Dirr, wrote he "always thought that the male grafted trees would make good, drought tolerant street trees." We agree. In fact, *Diospyros kaki* is one of the best dual purpose trees for the American garden. This easy to grow tree is richly ornamental as well as being abundantly fruitful. Japanese persimmons produce a shapely round headed tree with thick textured, lustrous large leaves reminiscent of the ever popular southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*). Add delectable fruit and reliable fiery fall color even in warm winter areas and you've got a tree no "American garden should be without."

There's nothing quite as spectacular as a persimmon orchard in the fall – hundreds of trees are an autumn carnival of yellow, red and burgundy. Yet, a single specimen can sweep you off your feet. The handsome glossy leaves lit with bright autumn color are accentuated by the glossy red, or orange or yellow of the fruit. Then, as the leaves fall, the beauty of the fruit is even more evident as it stands in bas relief against the architecture of the bare branches.

Demand for persimmons has been growing in leaps and bounds as more and more people have become familiar with the many merits of this age old favorite. Orange County Nursery has kept pace with the ever increasing demand and is one of the nation's largest growers of persimmons. We offer an extensive selection of the very finest bareroot and container varieties, both astringent and non-astringent. This year's crop is especially beautiful. Give us a call and we'll help you choose the variety best suited to your needs and tastes. Plant a persimmon – it will bring bounty to your table and beauty to your garden for years to come.

Shannon Lubin