

Diospyros virginiana: Common Persimmon¹

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Introduction

An excellent small to medium tree, common persimmon is an interesting, somewhat irregularly-shaped native tree, for possible naturalizing in yards or parks. Bark is grey or black and distinctly blocky with orange in the valleys between the blocks. Fall color can be a spectacular red in USDA hardiness zones 4 through 8a. It is well adapted to cities, but presents a problem with fruit litter, attracting flies and scavengers, such as opossums and other mammals. Its mature height can be 60 feet, with branches spreading from 20 to 35 feet and a trunk two feet thick, but it is commonly much shorter in landscapes. The trunk typically ascends up through the crown in a curved but very dominant fashion, rarely producing double or multiple leaders. Lateral branches are typically much smaller in diameter than the trunk.



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Diospyros virginiana*

Pronunciation: dye-OSS-pih-ross ver-jin-nee-AY-nuh

Common name(s): Common persimmon

Family: *Ebenaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 4B through 9B (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: fruit; reclamation; specimen; urban tolerant; highway median; bonsai

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 40 to 60 feet

Spread: 20 to 35 feet

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Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: oval, pyramidal
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: ovate, elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: red, yellow
Fall characteristic: showy



Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: orange
Fruit characteristics: attracts squirrels/mammals; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns
Pruning requirement: little required
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: gray, reddish, brown
Current year twig thickness: thin
Wood specific gravity: 0.79

Culture

Light requirement: full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: yes
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible
Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Common persimmon prefers moist, well-drained, bottomland or sandy soils but is also very drought- and urban-tolerant. Truly an amazing tree in its adaptability to about any site conditions, including alkaline soil. It is seen colonizing old fields as a volunteer tree but grows slowly on dry sites. Its fruit is an edible berry that usually ripens after frost, although some cultivars do not require the frost treatment to ripen. Before ripening, however, the fruit is decidedly astringent and not edible. Most American cultivars require both male and female trees for proper fruiting.

Except for cleaning up the messy fruit if it falls on a patio or sidewalk, common persimmon maintenance is quite easy and it could be planted more. Locate it where the slimy fruit will not fall on sidewalks and cause people to slip and fall. Because transplantation is difficult due to a coarsely-branched root system, persimmon trees should be balled and burlapped when young or planted from containers. The wood is used for golf club heads and is very hard and almost black.

The variety *pubescens* has fuzzy leaves and twigs.

Pests

No serious pests, except occasionally caterpillars.

Diseases

Common persimmon is troubled by a leaf-spot disease that may limit its use in the South. This disease causes black spots on the leaves and premature defoliation, sometimes in August in the North, September in the South. It will not kill the tree but the litter from early defoliation may be objectionable.

It is also susceptible to a vascular wilt which can be devastating to established trees.