

Diospyros virginiana: Common Persimmon¹

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, Andrew K. Koeser, Deborah R. Hilbert, and Drew C. McLean²

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.

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 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to the southern two-thirds of the eastern United States

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

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



Figure 1. Full Form—*Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon

1. This document is ENH390, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; Andrew K. Koeser, assistant professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Deborah R. Hilbert, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; and Drew C. McLean, biological scientist, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 40 to 60 feet

Spread: 20 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: oval, pyramidal

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: ovate, elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 ½ to 6 inches

Leaf color: dark green and shiny on top, paler green underneath

Fall color: yellow, red, and purple

Fall characteristic: showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon

Flower

Flower color: white to greenish white

Flower characteristics: not showy; fragrant; male: emerges in 3's; female: emerges solitary

Flowering: late spring to early summer



Figure 4. Flower—*Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: 1 ½ to 2 inches

Fruit covering: fleshy berry

Fruit color: green to orange when ripe

Fruit characteristics: attracts squirrels/mammals; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Fruiting: mid to late fall, usually ripens after a frost

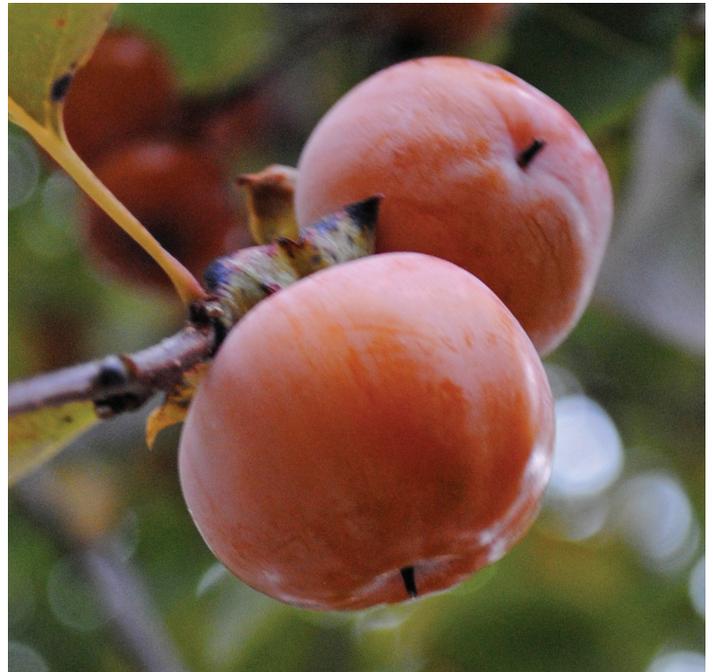


Figure 5. Fruit—*Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Bark: gray and brown with orange peering between fissures, then becoming nearly black and breaking into thick, squarish blocks with maturity

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: gray, reddish, brown

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: 0.79



Figure 6. Bark—*Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon
Credits: Gitta Hasing

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.

Reference

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.