

Persimmons

10/11/2016

Q: I was at a friend's house and was admiring how beautiful her persimmon tree looked with its fruits just turning orange? Does this tree need a lot of care? What varieties grow best here?

A: The Persimmon is a great fruit tree for the home orchard. They bloom late, therefore avoiding the spring frost and they don't require many hours of winter chilling. As temperature turn colder they develop vivid fall foliage that looks fantastic with the orange fruits. Persimmon trees thrive in a variety of soils as long as they have good drainage. They will tolerate wet feet in winter and dry conditions in summer. The tree and fruit is almost pest free.

There are two types of persimmon trees:

1. The Hachiya has large, deep orange-red, acorn-shaped fruit. The fruit is very astringent until very ripe and soft; wait until the flesh is quite soft before eating. The tree does not need crosspollination. Trees get large and require an area to allow for a 20 foot width. This is the best one for making persimmon cookies, a favorite of mine.

2. The Fuyu has medium to large, flat, orange-red colored fruit. The flesh is firm like that of an Apple and non-astringent when ripe. Cross-pollination is not required, but when present, the fruit will have seeds. The trees are smaller than Hachiya, requiring a width of 14 to 16 feet. The fruit loses astringency at maturity while still firm and crunchy. This is the best one for eating fresh and can be eaten skin and all.

The trees do not take a lot of care but may need some pruning to maintain shape. Persimmons bear mainly on new shoots that originate from near the tips of one-year-old branches, so avoid heading cuts. You should not need to thin the fruit of your Persimmons, though thinning increases fruit size and a large fruit load may break branches, so you may want to thin them to 6 inches apart.

Both types of Persimmons begin to ripen in late September through November. To harvest, use hand-pruning shears to cut the stem and allow the calyx (green collar) to remain attached. Hachiya (astringent) can be allowed to become soft ripe on the tree but are usually harvested firm ripe and allowed to soften at room temperature. Fuyu (non-astringent) are harvested when they develop their full color. Fruit will

store for a month or more under refrigeration. Persimmons can be frozen for up to a year before being used in puddings and cakes. Dried Persimmons have outstanding flavor and sweetness.