

Persimmons

Q: How do I know when to harvest the Persimmons on my tree?

A: Before I can answer this question I would need to know what type of Persimmon tree you have. Persimmon fruit is classified as either astringent or non-astringent. An astringent cultivar must be jelly soft before it is edible, whereas, a non-astringent cultivar can be eaten when it is crisp. Both Astringent and non-astringent cultivars grow well in the Redding area. Within each of these categories, there are cultivars whose fruits are influenced by pollination (pollination variant) and cultivars whose fruits are unaffected by pollination (pollination constant). The group of persimmons that is pollination constant has fruit with flesh that remains light colored after pollination. Fruit from the pollination variant group has fruit flesh that is light colored when seedless but turns reddish brown when pollinated and seeds are present. Actually, it is the seeds, not pollination per se, that influences the fruit as far as how astringent it becomes. In the astringent types of persimmon (Hachiya is a common cultivar of this type) the water-soluble tannins (which cause the astringency) decrease as the fruit softens.

In non-astringent, pollination variant, cultivars (such as the Chocolate cultivar) the soluble tannins only disappear if 4 or 5 seeds form in each fruit. If less seeds form, then some parts of the fruit will remain astringent. In pollination constant, non-astringent types, such as the Fuyu cultivar the fruit is edible when the flesh is firm but mature, regardless of the amount of seeds. This type of persimmon can be eaten when it is crisp as an apple.

All types of persimmons need hot summers to ripen however the astringent cultivars can be grown in cooler regions with some success. The shape of the fruit varies by

cultivar from spherical to acorn to flattened or squarish. The color of the fruit also varies from light yellow-orange to dark orange-red. The size can be as little as a few ounces to more than a pound. The entire fruit is edible except for the seed and calyx. Alternate bearing is common. This can be partially overcome by thinning the fruit or moderately pruning after a light-crop year. Astringency can also be removed by treating with carbon dioxide or alcohol. Freezing the fruit overnight and then thawing softens the fruit and also removes the astringency

Persimmons are best stored at room temperatures and the astringent type can be picked firm and allowed to soften on the counter. The University of California provides a chart for preserving the best flavor by proper storage of a variety of fruits, melons, and vegetables and is available at <http://ucfoodsafety.ucdavis.edu/files/26301.pdf>