

## Pick Persimmons at Peak of Ripeness

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Nov. 10, 2018

**Q:** How do I know when to harvest the persimmons on my tree? They've turned orange but seem very hard.

**A:** They should be ready now, but in order to determine the best time to harvest you'll need to know what type of persimmon tree you have. Persimmon fruit is classified as either astringent or non-astringent. The most commonly grown persimmons are the Hachiya; it has large, deep orange-red, acorn-shaped fruit. It's considered an astringent type; the fruit is very astringent until very ripe and soft. You want to wait until the flesh is quite soft before eating. It's the best variety for cooking because you can mash up the pulp easily. I like to use this variety to make persimmon cookies, a favorite of mine.



Persimmon (Photo: Rebekah D. Wallace, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org.)

The other common variety is the non-astringent type, Fuyu. It has medium to large, flat, orange-red colored fruit. The flesh is firm like that of an apple and non-astringent when ripe. If this tree has cross-pollinated, the fruit will have seeds. The trees are smaller than Hachiya, usually about 12- to 15-feet tall and wide. Fruit loses astringency at maturity while still firm and crunchy. This is the best one for eating fresh. It's usually sliced with the skin on and eaten just as

you would an apple.

So for determining ripeness, an astringent cultivar must be jelly-soft before it's edible; whereas a non-astringent cultivar can be eaten when it's crisp but has good orange color.

Both astringent and non-astringent cultivars grow well in the Redding area.



Persimmon fruit in a persimmon tree (Photo: Submitted Photo)

Each group of persimmons can either be pollination constant, which means that the flesh remains light colored after pollination or pollination variant, which means that the flesh color is light when seedless but turns reddish brown when pollinated and seeds are present. In the astringent types of persimmon — the Hachiya variety, the water-soluble tannins which cause the astringency decrease as the fruit

softens regardless of color.

In non-astringent, pollination variant, cultivars, such as chocolate, the soluble tannins only disappear if four or five seeds form in each fruit. If fewer 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.

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, the green collar, to remain attached. Hachiya can be allowed to become soft ripe on the tree but are usually harvested firm ripe and allowed to soften at room temperature. Fuyu 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. They also dry well and dried persimmons maintain outstanding flavor and sweetness.

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>

*The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email [mastergardener@shastacollege.edu](mailto:mastergardener@shastacollege.edu). The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.*