Diospyros virginiana
Common Persimmon

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

An excellent small to medium tree, Common Persimmon is an interesting, somewhat irregularly-shaped native tree, for possible naturalizing in yards or parks (Fig. 1). 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 9 (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Uses: Bonsai; fruit tree; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; specimen; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

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

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet
Spread: 20 to 35 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: oval; pyramidal
Crown density: moderate

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**Diospyros virginiana -- Common Persimmon**

**Growth rate:** medium  
**Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

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

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white  
**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round  
**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** orange  
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree; showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** brown; gray; reddish  
**Current year twig thickness:** thin  
**Wood specific gravity:** 0.79
**Diospyros virginiana -- Common Persimmon**

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; extended flooding; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high  
**Soil salt tolerance:** moderate

**Other**

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding  
**Invasive potential:** seeds itself into the landscape  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible  
**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

**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.