

# *Diospyros virginiana*: Common Persimmon<sup>1</sup>

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## 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

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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

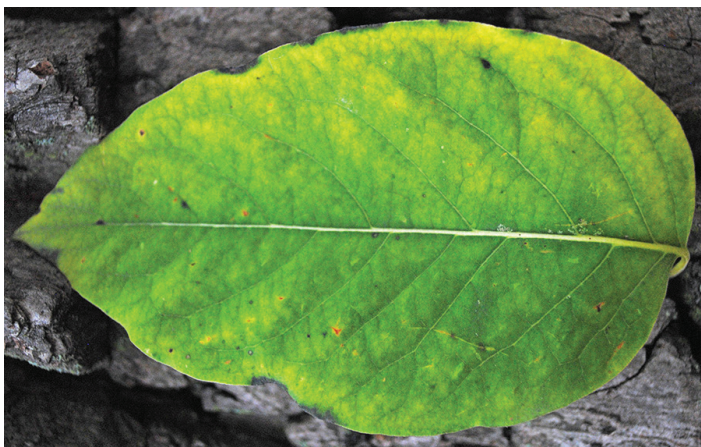


Figure 3. Leaf—*Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon

## 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

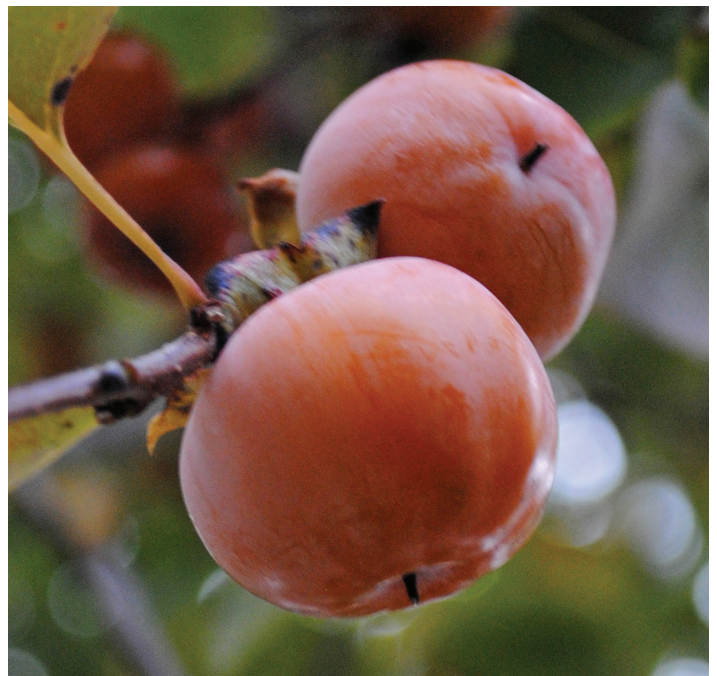


Figure 5. Fruit—*Diospyros virginiana*: common persimmon

## 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.