

Q. When can I harvest my Fuyu Persimmons?

A. Fuyu persimmons are the oriental part of the family Ebenaceae. *Diospyros kaki* L. f., is perhaps best-known in America as the Japanese, or Oriental, persimmon, occasionally Chinese plum or, when dried, Chinese fig. In Spanish, it is called *caqui*. Native to Japan, Burma, northern India and China, the tree can be found growing at altitudes from 1830-2500m (6000-8000 ft.) Marco Polo wrote about the persimmon trade in the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century, and it is featured in ceremonies throughout Asia, where over two thousand cultivars exist. It was not until the late 1800's that grafted trees were distributed to California, but by 1930, there were close to 100,000 bearing trees around the state. The trees do well in the mild climate portions of California, and over 90% of the total U.S. persimmon fruit crop is grown here. The trees can tolerate freezing temperatures if fully dormant, but the leaves can be killed if late frosts occur.

In the fall, these trees shine in the garden, with glowing yellow -red foliage and sparkling orange fruit. The shape can be variable, occasionally weeping and languid, sometimes open and erect. The large leaves tend to droop on the rather brittle branches. Small, inconspicuous flowers are found on last year's wood. The male blossoms are pink-tinged and in found in clusters of three; the female are creamy-white and single, blooming in March in the axils of newly emerging leaves. Male and female flowers tend to be found on separate trees. Some trees have both, and just to make things more complicated, a tree's sexual expression can change from year to year. Parthenocarpic, (fruit produced without fertilization, often seedless), cultivars are available, although most varieties will produce larger crops with a pollinator variety close by. The seed production, flavor and size may be different with additional pollen.

Oriental Persimmons fall into two general categories, astringent and non-astringent. The Fuyu, (Fuyugaki), falls into the non-astringent category, crisp and edible even before fully ripening. The skin is a deep orange color, the flesh a lighter orange. Fuyu persimmons should not be left on the tree until soft. These fruit keep well if harvested when firm. If you prefer the fruit a little softer, place it in a bag with a pear and leave it for several days. The ethylene gas released from the pear will facilitate the ripening of the persimmon.

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