

## Oriental persimmon

An underused, easy-to-grow, low maintenance and attractive fruit tree that you might consider adding to your fruit orchard/landscape is the oriental persimmon.

The apple size fruit is quite showy as it ripens to a bright orange color in the fall. Oriental persimmon, as the name implies, is not native to the United States. We do have our native common persimmon, botanically known as *Diospyros virginiana*. But the oriental persimmon, *Diospyros kaki L.*, is native to China and has been grown and selected in China, Korea and Japan for over 1,000 years. They were introduced to Florida in the mid-1800s.

Oriental persimmons are classified as either astringent or non-astringent. I enjoy both types but prefer the non-astringent cultivars. Astringent cultivars are like our native persimmon in that the fruit must be completely ripe and soft before it is suitable for eating. Biting into an unripe, firm common persimmon will make your mouth pucker, for awhile, due to its bitterness. The same is true for astringent oriental persimmons. But non-astringent types can be eaten when fully ripe or while still firm. The fruits ripen from August to December.

The tree may grow to the size of a typical pear tree but semi-dwarf plants are smaller maturing, reaching a height of around six to eight feet.

There are numerous cultivars from which to select. One of the most popular astringent cultivars in Florida is 'Tanenashi'. The most popular non-astringent cultivar in Florida and the most widely grown persimmon cultivar in the world is 'Fuyu'.

Oriental persimmon trees do best when planted in full sun but will tolerate a little shade. Persimmons will put up with a wide range of soil conditions as long as the soil is not overly salty and is well drained. Established trees have good drought tolerance. But bearing trees will produce higher quality fruit when watered regularly. Allowing a bearing tree to become overly dry will result in much fruit drop.

You do need patience when growing oriental persimmons. It can take a number of years for a young tree to reach the age where it will hold onto and mature a good crop of fruit. As the tree slowly matures, it will progressively retain and mature more fruit. Immature trees will likely shed many of the small, immature fruit. This is normal and usually improves with age as long as the tree is getting adequate sunlight, regular irrigation during dry periods and is not being over fertilized, especially with too much nitrogen fertilizer.

If you have the right spot, give this underused, attractive fruit tree a try.

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