

## *Diospyros virginiana* (Common Persimmon) Ebony Family (Ebenaceae)

### **Introduction:**

Common persimmon has distinctive thick, dark gray to black bark that is broken into scaly, square blocks. Because of its messy fruit, it is not among the better choices for the home landscape, but is an interesting native tree that is suited for use in parks, golf courses and naturalized areas.

### **Culture:**

Common persimmon grows best in moist, well-drained, sandy soils but will perform well in dry soils with low fertility. It prefers full sun and adapts to a variety of pH situations. It is hardy in Zones 4 to 9.

This tree can develop a blackish leaf spot, although trees seem to vary considerably in susceptibility. In the South, it is susceptible to a vascular wilt. Tent caterpillars can also be a problem.



### **Additional information:**

Common persimmon was introduced into the landscape in 1629. It is often found along fence rows and in abandoned fields. The tree suckers profusely and often forms naturalized stands.

Before ripening, persimmon's fruit is not edible. The fruit is not ripe until the skin is wrinkled. Fruit presents a litter problem, and attracts flies and opossums as well as raccoons, skunks, foxes, deer and songbirds. The plant is dioecious, so a male (fruitless) tree would be a much more acceptable landscape plant than the female.

Immature fruits contain a large amount of tannin and are astringent. They have been used to make tea for use in gargling for sore throats. The tea was also used to treat warts, cancers, heartburn, diarrhea and stomach aches.

Ripe persimmons are said to taste a great deal like dates. They are used to make cakes, puddings and beverages. Native Americans used the fruits to make bread, and also dried them. Cooking oil, with a flavor like that of peanut oil, can be extracted from the seeds.

Confederate soldiers boiled persimmon seeds as a coffee substitute during the Civil War. Persimmon wood is very hard and nearly black. It is used to make golf club heads, billiard cues and parquet flooring.

*Diospyros* means "fruit or wheat of the gods;" *virginiana* means "from Virginia." One common name, possum wood, was given to the tree because opossums love its fruit.

### **Botanical Characteristics:**

Native habitat: Connecticut to Florida, and west to Texas and Kansas.

Growth habit: Slender, oval-rounded form; usually has a symmetrical outline.

Tree size: 35 to 60 feet tall, 20 to 35 feet wide.

Flower and fruit: Flowers are white to greenish white and are shaped like blueberry flowers. The tree blooms in late April. Fruit is a yellowish to pale orange berry that is 1 to 1½ inches across. Fruit, which is edible, ripens in September or October. It is delicious when ripe, but highly unpleasant before ripening.

Leaf: Alternate, simple leaves are 2 1/4 to 5½ inches long, and 3/4 to 2 inches wide. Leaves are dark green in summer but have little or no fall color other than occasional purple blotches.

Hardiness: Winter hardy to USDA Zone 4.