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## Persimmon: the other Fall Fruit....

A wonderful and sweet fall treat, *diospyros* is the Latin name for this 'food of the gods'. There are two primary varieties of persimmon available, the flat, non-astringent Fuyu and the high, heart-shaped and astringent Hachiya. One other variety that is available in the winter is called the *Sharon fruit* – named for the Sharon Valley, near Tel Aviv, where they are cultivated (this is the only variety without seeds). All persimmon types have four leaves in their attached calyx; the seeds and calyx are not edible. Fuyu and Hachiya are both of Japanese origin with the species traced back to China; they are now Japan's national fruit and a traditional food for the Japanese New Year.



Persimmons are very sweet when ripe and can be eaten out of hand or used for making puddings, preserves and wine. Persimmon pudding is a dessert baked with fresh persimmons and has the consistency of pumpkin pie but resembles a brownie and is almost always topped with whipped cream.

The fruit's flavor has hints of pumpkin, allspice and honey. Good source of phosphorous, potassium, and vitamins A and C. Also high in fiber content and beta carotene, they are a great seasonal addition to one's diet. Persimmons may be stored at room temperature (20°C) where they will continue to ripen. Unripe Hachiya can be stored for up to a month in the refrigerator prior to ripening. Fruit can be ripened at room temperature when ready to consume; ripe fruit does not store well. Choose smooth, brightly colored fruit that are plump and glossy. Fruit with irregular light coloring are not yet ripe. Fuyu and Sharon fruit should be slightly firm to the touch, Hachiya are ripe when soft, like a ripe tomato.

**Other names:** Date Plum, Kaki, Simmon

**Availability:** October through February

**Fuyu Persimmon** - To the uninitiated, Fuyu Persimmons look like orange-red tomatoes because they are flat and round. They taste like a roasted squash, ripe stonefruit and honey all mixed together. Best used when they are soft and pliable (but not mushy) they can also be eaten when firm - out of hand, like an apple. Fuyus can be eaten this way because they have no tannins like other persimmon varieties so there is no astringent quality. Available domestically from California through December, they are also available from China, Brazil, Japan and Korea to extend the season. They can be used for both savory and sweet applications; add them to salads, baked with poultry, stewed for jams and spreads and baked for desserts. Fuyus are an interesting compliment to lamb or other meats as chutney.

**Hachiya Persimmon** - The Hachiya is also round at the top but tapers to more of a heart-shape; this variety accounts for about 90% of the domestic commercial crop. This variety should ripen at room temperature and be enjoyed when ripe and soft. The fruit has a high tannin content

which makes the immature fruit astringent and bitter. Tannins are the same natural chemicals that are found in red wine and tea and these tannins are reduced as the fruit matures. Hachiya must be completely ripened before consumed; the reward is worth the wait. Even scooped with a spoon, this sweet treat is a delicate culinary treat!

In China, Korea and Japan, the 'Hachiya' persimmons are harvested and prepared using traditional hand-drying techniques, outdoors for two to three weeks. The fruit is then further dried by exposure to heat over several days before being shipped to market. In Japan the dried fruit is called *Hoshigaki*, and is eaten as a snack or dessert. In some of the areas in China and Korea, the dried leaves of the fruit are used for making tea.

[Sharon Fruit](#) – This is an Israeli variety of persimmon that has been developed to be eaten firm and out of hand, like the Fuyu. While available for the past two centuries in Europe and the Mediterranean – this fruit has been available throughout the Middle East since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. This is the only variety of persimmon that is seedless and coreless but it still maintains the four leaves in the calyx and the customary orange color. This fruit most closely resembles the Fuyu, though it's generally a bit smaller in diameter and more squared in shape.

- [Ripening tips:](#) If the astringent Hachiya persimmon need to be used quickly, there are two ways to accelerate the ripening process to make them available within 2-4 days:
  1. Enclose the needed fruit in a container that can be sealed to eliminate oxygen. This will stimulate production of *aldehydes* which will counteract the astringency of tannins.
  2. Use alcohol (liquor) to stimulate production of naturally occurring ethylene in the fruit. Place the persimmons in a sealable (airtight) plastic foodservice container and put a few drops of brandy, rum, etc. on each of the leaves of the fruit. Seal the container and leave in a cool (not refrigerated) area for 1 -2 days. Check the fruit for ripeness; the persimmons should be ready within 2-4 days.
- Some chefs resort to freezing as an overnight method to accelerate the ripening process of Hachiya persimmons. While this practice *softens* the fruit because the cellulose has been damaged and broken down, there is not an immediate change in the tannin levels and the persimmon will remain astringent.

There are other varieties of persimmons that are available in local and farmer's markets and they should be tasted and explored like any other culinary treasure. Watch for small cultivations of chocolate, cinnamon and make sure that you investigate these rare treats too! Bon Appetite!