

Food of the Gods

by Shawn Jadrnicek

If you've ever bitten into an unripe persimmon it's unlikely you'll ever forget the experience. The memory of puckered lips and a pasty mouth restrain you from partaking of the fruit when it's ripe. However, a ripe persimmon easily lives up to its Greek scientific name Diospyros or "food of the gods." If you've had the unripe persimmon experience you're not alone. The early American colonists didn't know how to eat the persimmon. The Native Americans had to explain the blet or rotting of the fruit that must occur to realize the juicy sweetness. Once the fruit was ripe the early colonists were amazed, Captain John Smith described the fruit as delicious as an apricot.



In Asia, the persimmon has been carefully cultivated for thousands of years leading to over 2000 different persimmon varieties. Some of these varieties have made their way into American markets as Fuyo and Hachiya. Varieties are broken down into two basic categories non-astringent and astringent. Non-astringent varieties have the ability to be eaten hard like an apple without the mouth puckering experience first-timers have come to know. Both Asian categories can be grown here as well as the smaller astringent native persimmon. The trees make a beautiful addition to the landscape with large tropical looking leaves and brilliant fall color. The fruit will hang like bright orange ornaments after the leaves have left. Whatever humans don't eat the birds will find and devour in a feast that a bird feeder could never provide.

Persimmons are not particular, benefiting from full or partial sun and thriving with little or no care. Plant them as a centerpiece in your lawn or along a forest edge for fall color and wildlife food. In as little as three years you too, could be in heaven enjoying the "food of the gods."

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