

POSSIBLE PROFITS FROM PERSIMMONS

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Southern Arizona Well Adapted to the Production of Persimmons; A Brief Discussion of Cultural Practices and Marketing

THE ancient Romans gave to the persimmon the name of Diospyros to signify that it was the bread of the Gods. Like many other Oriental fruits, however, it has been lost to the people of the temperate zone. Now, centuries later, the sub-tropical fruits are again coming into their rightful heritage which places them among the finest fruits the world has known. Southern Arizona may therefore consider itself fortunate to be among the few favored sections in the United States where such fruit can be grown.

The Japanese Persimmon is distinctly a sub-tropical fruit, the regions where it can be grown being limited to areas somewhat wider than that of the fig. It has been thought for some time that it was not adapted to the lower inland valleys of the Southwest, due to the high prevailing summer temperatures. However, recent experience has indicated that a high degree of atmospheric humidity is not necessary, and that the mature tree is capable of standing the heat of the summer if supplied with plenty of water. The soil requirements are not exacting, a deep, reasonably heavy, well drained soil produces the largest tree and the highest quality of fruit. However, satisfactory results are obtained on light sandy soils, high in organic matter.

The tree is variable in size and shape depending upon the variety and kind of stock used. The tree is a vigorous grower, unless of the dwarf type, sometimes attaining a height of 40 feet. Planting distances will therefore vary with the variety planted, 18 to 24 feet being the usual limits.

Cultural Practices

The land upon which persimmons are to be planted is often prepared in advance by plowing under a green manure crop. This assures the young trees the best conditions under which to start growth. However, this practice is not absolutely necessary except upon virgin land. The trees are planted in midwinter, January or February being the best time for Southern Arizona. The tops should each be cut back to about 18 inches and injured roots removed. Care should be taken in planting not to allow the roots to become dry. Irrigation soon after planting is also advisable.

During the first year, the tree should be protected from the sun by a burlap or palm leaf shade, placed on the south side and slightly over the tree. This prevents sunburn and protects the tree from hot dry winds to a degree. The persimmon needs careful and consistent irrigation, and should not be permitted to become dry at any time.

The trees blossom very heavily in the spring, the blossoms coming out on the new growth after it attains a length of six inches or so. In a short time the blossoms begin to fall and this self thinning continues for an indefinite period. This is the natural habit of the tree and usually results in the retention of all the fruit that the tree can bear and mature to the proper size. Dropping can be controlled to a degree by careful irrigations at critical periods when hot spells are likely to occur.

Nothing definite is known in pruning persimmons, but a few general rules should be observed. Moderate pruning is always best; a severe pruning is disastrous. The latter dwarfs trees and defers fruit bearing in young trees. Never stub, as stubbing changes the tree from fruit bearing to vegetative growth. Never cut off any leaf surface from young trees and later thin only.

Trees twenty-five years old are known, which have not yet been pruned and do not need to be. Some wood dies each year—nature's pruning, and this is removed, no other pruning being done.

The persimmon may fall into the habit of alternate bearing very easily. Pruning may be used to influence this but sufficient work has not been done on the subject to give definite proof. Careful irrigation and moderate pruning are thought to be the best methods of preventing the alternate bearing habit.

Among the outstanding varieties of persimmons for the Southwest are the Hachiya, Fuyu and Taninashi. In California the Hachiya has been found to be the most successful, and present plantings are being made almost exclusively to that variety. Without doubt this variety will be the best for Arizona as it is a vigorous grower, stands the heat well, and produces a large crop of high quality fruit.

Picking and Packing

In picking great care must be taken in handling the fruit. If clippers are used, the stems should be cut short to avoid punctures. Small picking sacks and containers are used to avoid all bruises to the fruit. In packing for storage only "hard ripe" perfect fruit should be used, everything doubtful being packed for immediate consumption. Fruit which shows any green should not be picked. Pack immediately after picking and place in storage.

Persimmons as they are taken from the tree, packed and sent to market are highly astringent and uneatable. They may be kept in this state for a considerable time to cover the holiday trade or may be ripened in a few days for eating. As the fruit ripens and becomes of a jelly-like consistency, the astringency disappears and they are then ready for use. Several methods are used to ripen the persimmon artificially, one of the most recent being the use of ethylene gas. Forty-eight hours exposure to the gas usually being sufficient to ripen the fruit.

The fruit can be marketed in standard lug boxes or in specially designed crates for shipping. Two standard packs have been selected by the California Growers' Association. The regular Los Angeles lug is used; fruit packing five by six is designated as grade A, fruit packing six by seven as grade B. Two layers are packed in a box with several thicknesses of paper between the layers. For shipping long distances a special box designed similar to an egg crate has been used successfully.

The problem of marketing the persimmon has given little trouble so far to the growers of the fruit, as the home market has absorbed the crop at a high price without difficulty. The national market may be said to be almost untouched at the present. There are millions of people in the United States who have never seen nor eaten the fruit. These people comprise a potential market which promises to be practically unlimited for years to come. The persimmon is at its best at the holiday season, when it has little competition from other fruit, and the people may be said to be in the mood to appreciate its fine flavor and high quality.