

Persimmon Tree Care Guide

Fruit: Orange, sweet, plum sized

Height: 20-30' (American) 15-20' (Hybrids) - can be kept smaller with pruning

Years to bearing: 3-5

Persimmon trees are very easy to care for once established but require some patience. Slow growing at first, they should start rewarding you with delicious orange fruits in 3-5 years. Persimmon trees have very few pests and diseases in the northeast, but should still be protected against deer, rabbits, and groundhogs.

Planting

Dig a hole as deep as the pot and twice as wide. Carefully remove the tree from the pot.

Persimmon trees have very coarse root systems and the soil may fall away. **Persimmon tree roots are black, do not be alarmed!** Set the tree in the hole so that the soil line is about where it was in the pot. Do not bury the graft union. Before backfilling, water in the tree. Then start filling the hole with the soil from the hole (no compost or other amendments). Fill the hole $\frac{1}{3}$ and water again. Fill another $\frac{1}{3}$ and water, and finally fill the rest of the way and water in. Top with some compost, a light dose of fertilizer (I prefer to use organic or slow release fertilizer), and a layer of mulch.

Establishment Care

Continue watering every 3 days or so for the first 4 weeks. Water right next to the trunk to keep the rootball moist while the roots grow into the surrounding soil. After that, you should be able to water about once a week unless it is unusually dry. When the buds start to grow, the new stems will unfold rapidly and may look droopy. This is normal. If you stick to the watering regimen they will be fine, but you can feel for moisture in the original potting soil to be sure they aren't too wet or drying out. If you keep a regular watering regimen, you should be able to maintain good growth through July or later and the tree should be well established by fall from a spring or summer planting.

First Winter - Special Note for Hybrids

Hybrid persimmon trees are less hardy while small. For the first winter, I highly recommend protecting the tree to a bit higher than the graft union. This can be as simple as piling leaves high in a protective cage and removing them in the spring.

Caging:

I recommend using a cage of hardware cloth, chicken wire, etc, to protect against deer, rabbits, and other browsers. Rabbits love to eat twigs of small persimmons over the winter, and deer will eat just about anything! Rabbits only require a cage 2-3' high and 1-2' wide. Deer require much more substantial protection against browsing and rubbing. I recommend a 4' or taller cage 3-4'

wide. For rabbits, I use ½" hardware cloth. That will also work for deer, but welded wire fencing or chicken wire may be more affordable for larger cages.

Pests:

The only common pest persimmons face in New England is the persimmon psyllid. These are small sucking insects, and the larvae attack new growth. They rarely are present in large enough numbers to cause trouble, but in large numbers they can cause new growth to deform. This is mostly an issue with smaller trees. You can treat them by hand crushing or using insecticidal soap.

Pruning:

Persimmon trees require very little pruning. You can top the central leader to control height. Otherwise, thinning cuts are preferable to heading cuts, as fruit grows from the last few buds of the previous year's growth. It's not uncommon for persimmon trees to shed shaded or small branches. This is normal and healthy for a persimmon. American persimmons tend to have a more upright growth habit, and the hybrids tend to be more open/vase shaped.

Harvest:

Hybrid and American persimmon fruits are astringent until very soft ripe. They can be picked when colored up but still firm and allowed to soften on a kitchen counter (this is a good defense against squirrels, raccoons, and other persimmon-loving critters). If ripened on the tree, American persimmons will drop at a light touch or shake when fully ripe. You can set out a net or tarp to catch the fruits as they fall if you like. Hybrids will hang on the tree and must be picked by hand or with a picking tool.