

Diospyros kaki

[Synonyms : *Diospyros chinensis*, *Diospyros roxburghii*]

JAPANESE PERSIMMON is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to eastern Asia (particularly Japan) it has small cream-coloured flowers and leaves which turn to orange, then red to purple in Autumn.

It is also known as *Caqui* (Spanish), *Chee* (Chinese), Chinese date-plum, Chinese persimmon, Date-plum, *Dieng-iong* (Assamese), *Halwa tendu* (Hindi), *Hông* (Vietnamese), Japanese date-plum, Kakee, Kaki (Czech, English, French, German, Japanese, Swedish), *Kakibaum* (German), *Kaki churma* (Czech), *Kaki del Japón* (Spanish), *Kakihedelmä* (Finnish), *Kakinoki* (Japanese), *Kakinoko-diospiro* (Esperanto), Kaki persimmon, *Kakipflaume* (German), Kaki plum, *Kasemek* (Javanese), Keg fig, *Kesemak* (Malay), Oriental persimmon, Persimmon, *Persimon* (Czech), *Persimone* (German), *Placa minera* (Spanish), *Plaqueminier* (French), *Plaqueminier de Chine* (French), *Shi* (Chinese), *Shi zi* (Chinese), and *Tomel japonský* (Czech).

Unlike the persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), which is only edible when it is over-ripe, this variety can be eaten when it is ripe but firm, with a brown colour beneath the skin.

Kaki is a Japanese name (in full, *kaki-no-ki*) for this species.

The Japanese poets enshrined this persimmon in their musing, and one legend relates how the tree came into being. Briefly it tells how in the 12th Century one of the famous samurai, Yoshitsune, brought down the giant, Benkei. His fall was so great that it caused a huge crack in the earth and from this sprang a fruiting persimmon tree.

The small tomato-like, glossy orange-yellow fruit, which is now a national fruit of Japan, can be eaten fresh, dried or candied. Traditionally they are eaten during New Year festivities in China and Japan.

The Swedish botanist, Carl Per Thunberg (1743-1828), travelled to South Africa, Java and Japan in the 1770s and saw the Japanese persimmon in Japan in 1776.

Japanese persimmon was introduced to Europe in 1796 (it can still be found growing in the south of France). It reached the United States in 1856. (Some natural historians suggest it was taken there by a US naval officer, Commodore Matthew G. Perry (1794-1858) in 1855 following diplomatic trading negotiations between the United States and Japan which he had led). But it was still little known for its fruit in Europe as a whole or in North America until about 1870 (authorities have pointed out that the fruit first appeared in Parisian markets only in 1873).

The hard wood has been used locally to make small objects.

Medicinally, the dried fruit have been used in Chinese medicine to treat coughs and breathing disorders.

SHARON FRUIT is a shrub or tree. It was developed in Israel in the Sharon valley.

The pulp provides a commercial ingredient used by the cosmetics industry in face packs.