

*Diospyros virginiana*

[Synonyms : *Diospyros mosieri*, *Diospyros virginiana* var. *mosieri*, *Diospyros virginiana* var. *platycarpa*, *Diospyros virginiana* var. *pubescens*]

**PERSIMMON** is an evergreen or deciduous tree. Native to the south-eastern United States it has small reddish or greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as American persimmon, *Amerika gaki* (Japanese), Boawood, Butterwood, *Caqui de Virginia* (Spanish), *Caqui silvestre* (Spanish), Common persimmon, Cylil date plum, Date plum, *Diospiro Virginia* (Esperanto), Eastern persimmon, *Echtes Persimmon* (German), Florida persimmon, *Haluvaabed* (Nepalese), *Helles Ebenholz* (German), *Khurma virginskaia* (Russian), *Mei zhou shi* (Chinese), North American ebony, Persimmon tree, *Persimone* (German), *Persimono* (Esperanto), *Plaqueminier* (French), *Plaqueminier d'Amérique* (French), *Plaqueminier de Virginie* (French), Possum apple, Possumwood, Seeded plum, Simmon, *Tomel viržinský* (Czech), Virginia date palm, Virginia date plum, White ebony, Wild fig, Winter plum, and Yellow plum; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'bury me amid nature's beauties' (blossom), and 'I shall surprise you by and by' (blossom).

Cultivated varieties have larger fruit.

Warning – unripe green fruit can cause oral numbness and some authorities note that contact with the heartwood can sometimes cause dermatitis.

*Virginiana* means 'of or from Virginia (United States)' which itself was named after the English 'Virgin Queen' Elizabeth I (1533-1603).

The common name Persimmon is said to be rooted in a phonetic representation of a North American Indian name for the fruit.

According to records these small fruit were eaten by the Comanche, Cherokee and Seminole North American Indians, and the Rappahannock tribe used them to make a beer.

The tree was also a source of medicines for several North American tribes. It was used by both the Rappahannock and Cherokee tribes for treating sore throats, and the latter also employed it in remedies for some liver problems, indigestion and piles, and also in the treatment of some venereal diseases.

In 1536 Hernando de Soto (c.1500-1542), the Spanish explorer, was made Governor of Cuba and Florida and three years later decided to explore the south-eastern part of the North American Continent. As a result he and his soldiers (who came into conflict with many of the North American Indians they met on their travels) became the first Europeans to see the Mississippi River in 1541. He subsequently reported that there he saw the local Indian tribes (probably Iroquois) eating a kind of bread made from dried persimmons.

Early settlers in North America also used the fruit to make bread – as well as beer, wine and brandy. The orange or reddish-yellow fruit, which are not especially popular today, cannot only be eaten raw but, apart from bread, they can also be used for making pies, jams, preserves and puddings.

The fruit, which are rich in tannin, are enjoyed by birds, foxes, raccoons, opossums, skunks, squirrels and ringtailed cats.

Apart from its heartwood being hard and strong, it is also impact-resistant. This explains why it has been and still can be popular for the heads of golf clubs, and has also been used for

parquet flooring, shoe lasts and billiard cues. The sapwood can be used for industrial shuttles.

Medicinally, the inner bark has been used locally to treat fever, diarrhoea, dysentery and sore throats.