



Diospyros kaki

Diospyros kaki, also called persimmon, is the most widely cultivated species of the genus *Diospyros*. Although its first published botanical description was not until 1780, the kaki is among the oldest plants in cultivation, known for its use in China for more than 2000 years. In some rural Chinese communities, the kaki fruit is seen as having a great mystical power that can be harnessed to solve headaches, back pains and foot ache.

The persimmon (kaki) is a sweet, slightly tangy fruit with a soft to occasionally fibrous texture. This species, native to China, is deciduous, with broad, stiff leaves. Cultivation extended first to other parts of East Asia, including Japan where it is very popular. It was later introduced to California and southern Europe in the 19th century, to Brazil in the 1890s, and numerous cultivars have been selected. A variety is *Diospyros kaki* var. *sylvestris* Makino. When ripe, this fruit comprises thick pulpy jelly encased in a waxy thin-skinned shell.

In many cultivars, known as the astringent varieties, the fruit has a high proanthocyanidin-type tannin content which makes the immature fruit astringent and bitter. The tannin levels are reduced as the fruit matures. The fruit of those cultivars is not edible in its crisp, firm state; it tastes best when allowed to rest and soften after harvest. It has a soft jelly-like consistency and is best eaten with a spoon. The Japanese 'Hachiya' is a widely grown astringent cultivar. Other cultivars, such as 'Fuyu', do not contain tannins when firm. Those can be eaten like an apple or can be allowed to go to any stage of ripeness, including to the jelly-like stage. These non-astringent varieties are, however, considered to have a less complex flavor.

"Sharon Fruit" (named originally after Sharon plain in Israel) is a trade name for non-astringent *D. kaki* fruit.

Names

Diospyros kaki is commonly called Japanese persimmon, Chinese persimmon, kaki (from Japanese name 柿, kaki), kaki persimmon, and Oriental persimmon.

Tree

Similar in shape to an apple tree, the kaki tree reaches a size of up to 10 metres (33 ft). Its deciduous leaves are medium to dark green, broadly lanceolate, stiff and equally wide as long. Blooming from May to June, the trees are typically either male or female, but some produce both types of flowers. Furthermore, the sexual expression of a tree may vary from year to year. Unusually, the kaki fruits ripen when the leaves have mostly fallen off the tree, typically in October and November.

Flower

Kaki trees typically do not bear until they are 3 to 6 years old. The 2 centimetres (1 in)-2.5 centimetres (1 in) wide flowers appear in the spring. Female flowers have a creamy yellow color and tend to grow singly, while male flowers have a pink tint and tend to appear in threes. The flowers have four crown-shaped sepals and four petals. On occasion, bisexual flowers occur. Some varieties (parthenocarpic) will produce seedless fruit even in the absence of pollination, but their pollinated flowers will produce larger fruit riddled with seeds.

Fruit

The spherical to oval fruit, bearing the indented stem and four sepals, can weigh up to 500 grams (18 oz). The smooth, shiny, thin shell ranges in shade from yellow to red-orange. The slightly lighter fleshed fruits can contain up to eight seeds and may have an astringent taste. With increasing maturity, the fruit softens, similar to a kiwifruit.

The high content of tannin in the still-immature kaki provides a bitter component reminiscent of pear and apricot flavors, which becomes weaker with progressive maturation.

Cultivation

Kaki are grown worldwide, with 90 percent of the total in China, Japan and Korea. In East Asia the main harvest time for kaki is in the months of October and November. The trees lose their leaves by harvest time. Occasionally, the brightly colored fruit is left unharvested on the tree as a decorative effect.

In China, kaki has been cultivated since time immemorial.

Cultivation of this species at first spread through East Asia. Since the 19th century, kaki partially replaced date-plum (*Diospyros lotus*, also known as Caucasian persimmon) in some countries in South Europe and West Asia, because kaki have bigger fruits than date-plum; cultivation in California began at that time.

The "Sharon" is a variegated form of kaki from Israel, named after the fertile Plain of Sharon. It does not contain seeds and tastes more mild, since it contains less tannin. Cross cut, the Sharon shows a star-shaped pattern of lines with darker flesh.

In Spain, there is a variegated form of kaki, the "Ribera del Xuquer" of the Valencia region, also called Spanish persimmon (with one 'm') or Rojo Brillante ("bright red").

In culture

Throughout Asia, healing properties are attributed to the kaki. They are said to be helpful against stomach ailments and diarrhea. Immature fruits are said to be a treatment for fever, if they ripen in containers until they are sweet as honey. The juice of unripe fruit is said to lower blood pressure and the fruit stem to relieve a cough. To reinforce these effects, the fruit is peeled before use, exposed to the sunlight during the day and to the dew at night, until a white powdery coating forms.

Consumption

Remove the leaves before serving. The skin can be eaten (especially when the fruit is ripe and the tannins are almost completely decomposed), but many remove the skin before eating. They can also be dried (after skinning and rinsing with Shōchū or after leaving 24 hours in hot spring water). Two fruits are attached by a string which is then hung over a pole.

In Korea, the persimmon is called gam (Korean: 감), and it is usually eaten as a dessert or when there are guests at home. The persimmon is usually cut into sections and the skin and core is usually removed. Persimmons are eaten dry during the winter, and they are very popular amongst children. In autumn, families and farmers from the rural areas collect persimmons and hang them to dry. Powdered sugar is sometimes added to enhance the sweetness.

Persimmon vinegar is made from Oriental persimmons.