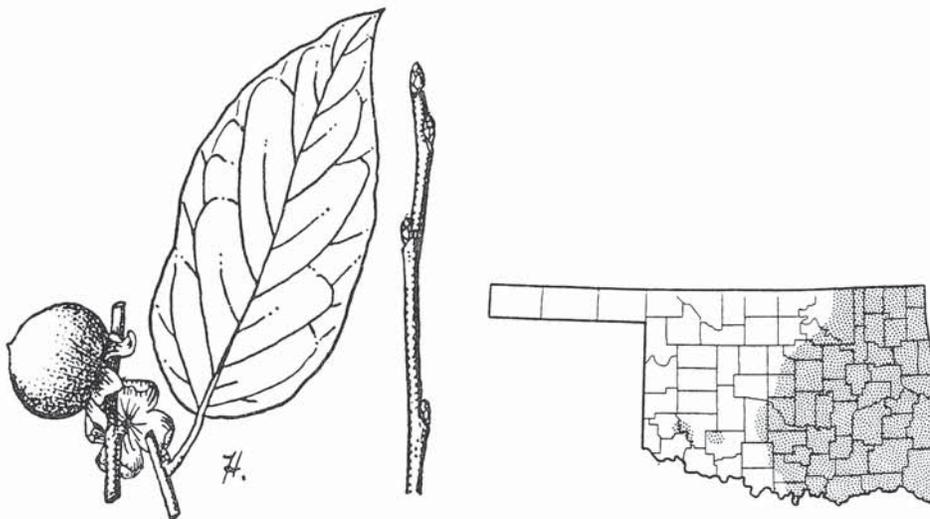


144. COMMON PERSIMMON

Diospyros virginiana L.; persimmon, simmon.

Small to large tree 60 ft (18 m) high and 1½ ft (0.5 m) in diameter, with cylindrical or rounded dense crown, also a thicket-forming shrub. Twigs slender, slightly zigzag, brown to gray, often hairy, pith often with horizontal lines or plates. Buds small, pointed, with 2 shiny dark brown scales; no end bud.



Leaves often partly in 2 rows, *drooping*, ovate to elliptical, 2½-6 in (6-15 cm) long, 1½-3 in (4-7.5 cm) wide, long-pointed, rounded at base, edges *not toothed*, slightly thickened, *shiny dark green* and hairless above, *beneath whitish green* and hairless or densely hairy, turning yellow in autumn.

Flowers scattered and almost stalkless at leaf base in spring, with *bell-shaped* 4-lobed *white* corolla, fragrant. Male flowers 2-3 together, ¾ in (10 mm) long; female flowers single on different trees, 5/8 in (15 mm) long.

Fruits rounded or slightly flattened *berries* ¾-1½ in (2-4 cm) in diameter, *orange to purplish brown persimmons*, maturing in autumn before frost and often remaining attached into winter. Pulp orange, very astringent when immature, becoming soft, juicy, and sweet. Seeds 4-8, large, elliptical flattened, brown.

Bark *blackish* or dark brown, thick, *deeply furrowed into small square scaly plates or blocks*, inner bark astringent, bitter.

Wood mostly thick whitish sapwood turning brown on exposure, heartwood very small and irregular, blackish brown or black, often streaked, ring porous, very heavy (sp. gr. .64), very hard, very strong. Principal uses: golf-club heads, shuttles for textile weaving, spools, bobbins, handles, and veneer in furniture.

Common and widespread on moist soils of valleys and uplands in oak-hickory and pine-oak forests, also a pioneer on clearings and old fields, producing root sprouts, e. half of Okla. and w. to Wichita Mts. Local in valleys in nw. Okla. (Woods, Woodward, and Ellis Cos.), apparently introduced and spreading. E. half of U.S. except n. border. Zone 4.

Mature persimmon fruits when soft and wrinkled have a sweetish taste and are eaten raw and sometimes prepared in pudding, cake, and beverages. Quantities are consumed by wildlife. Immature hard fruits have a strong puckery or astringent taste because of tannin, which becomes insoluble in ripening in early autumn before first frost.

American Indians dried the fruits like prunes and made persimmon bread. The word persimmon is from the Algonquian name. The trees are grown for fruit and ornament. Perhaps these wild fruits could be improved through selection and research. Persimmon is the northernmost New World representative of the Ebony Family (Ebenaceae), which is mostly tropical.