NTFPs from Trees: Nontimber Forest Products that Support our Society and Economy

COMMON PERSIMMON

FOOD

Product: Persimmon fruit
Plant parts used: Fruit

The **common persimmon** (*Diospyros virginiana* L.) is a slow-growing, medium-sized tree. It can grow under a variety of conditions and is often found in abandoned fields and denuded cropland with poor soils. The native range extends from Connecticut to southern Florida, and west into Kansas and Oklahoma (shown in green on the map below). The species is most abundant in the rich bottomlands of the Mississippi River and associated tributaries.

Key Points

- Common persimmon is native to the United States but is not the primary persimmon species in commerce.
- People value common persimmon for its fruit, but it is also used for landscaping and can improve wildlife habitat.
- Since 2002, there has been a decline in volume of common persimmon per acre of forest land.
- Local communities could realize economic development potential by encouraging harvesting of natural stands of common persimmon.
- Thinning forest stands to release crowns may increase fruit production for humans and wildlife.

Nontimber Uses

- The fruit of common persimmon is the primary product of interest, though the wood used to be desired for such items as golf club heads.
- Prior to European settlers, indigenous people ate the fruit fresh and dried, using it to make bread or dehydrated 'cakes' that were used throughout the year.
- Native Americans used the inner bark and unripe fruit to treat various ailments and used the immature pulp to make dye.
- The attractive glossy, leathery leaves make common persimmon popular for landscaping.

Markets

- The market is dominated by orchard-grown Japanese persimmon, a smaller tree that grows in warm climates and produces larger and sweeter fruits. In 2014, the value to the State of California, the major producer, was about $8 million.
- In 2015, the United States exported >$6 million of cultivated persimmon, mostly to Canada and Mexico.
- Common persimmon fruit collected from natural stands is a specialty item for local consumption, with a very limited market.
- The primary markets for common persimmon are farm stands, farmers markets, and other direct consumer venues.
- Festivals in Indiana and North Carolina that market common persimmon fruit to local communities demonstrate that other communities could benefit from expansion of markets for wild-harvested fruit.
- Efforts are underway to develop common persimmon as an alternative specialty crop.

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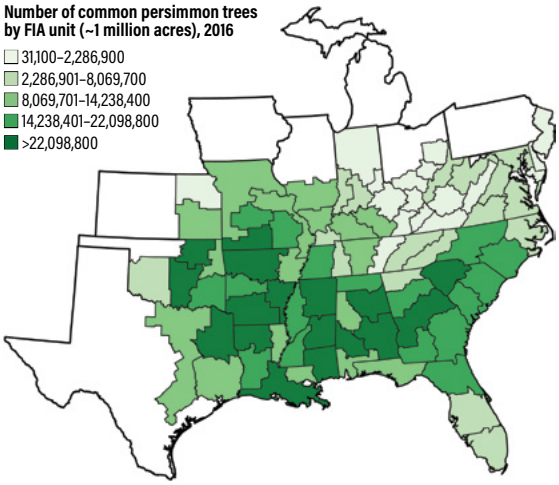

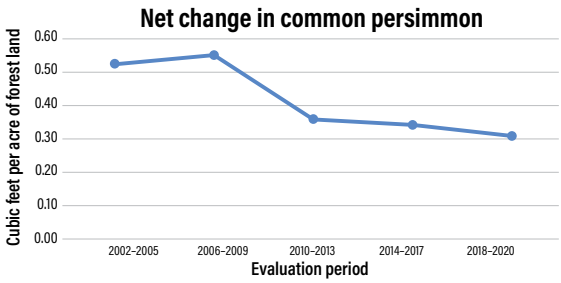

Status[a]

- Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data reveal that Mississippi, Arkansas, and Oklahoma have the highest per-acre concentration of common persimmon trees in forests (see the map to the left).
- In their latest evaluation year, Delaware had the greatest positive net change (i.e., difference between growth and sum of mortality and removals), followed by West Virginia and Indiana.
- Oklahoma, Ohio, and Texas had the greatest decline in net change in their latest evaluation year.
- A decline in annual growth with an increase in mortality resulted in a decline in volume per acre of common persimmon over the period 2002–2020 (see the chart to the left).

[a] Estimates are based on observations of at least one specimen of the species in an inventory plot (representing about 6,000 acres of forest land). They are not based on all forest land for the State.

Management and Implications

- Common persimmon is often considered undesirable in forests managed for timber and has been controlled through prescribed fires.
- If fruit production is desired, releasing tree crowns from competition by thinning may stimulate growth and fruiting of common persimmon.
- Although Japanese persimmon is the major species in commerce, the native common persimmon may have potential for communities to realize economic development opportunities.
- Integrating common persimmon into forest management may improve wildlife habitat, as well as peoples' food security and nutrition.

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service **Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA)** program tracks growth, mortality, and removals of forest trees and more. For additional information: https://www.fia.fs.fed.us/

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