

Native Fruit and Nuts Hillside Plant Descriptions

American persimmon is a woody, deciduous tree in the Ebenaceae (ebony) family. It is native to the central and eastern United States and can reach 30 to 80 feet high and 20 to 35 feet wide. The name persimmon comes from 'putchamin', a phonetic rendering of the name used by the Algonquin tribe of the American Indians.

Persimmons are dioecious, meaning there are separate male and female trees, and you need both or a self-fruitful variety such as Meader or Morris Burton in order to get fruit. The persimmon flowers in spring to early summer and produces fruits in the fall. The fruits are very sweet when ripe and are a food source for many birds and mammals. The fruit has a distinctive beak at the base of the fruit.

Persimmon grows best in moist, well-drained, sandy soils in full sun to partial shade. It will tolerate hot, dry conditions, poor soils, urban conditions, and wind. Under poor conditions, the tree may maintain a 15-foot shrub-like appearance. The tree can be propagated by grafting, root cutting, or seed, but a deep taproot makes it difficult to transplant. American persimmons will not bear fruit right away. Trees propagated from seeds begin producing fruit in 4-9 years. Grafted trees need 3 years. It may take as many as 10 years for trees to come into full production.

Branches do not contain terminal buds. A new leaf forms where a terminal bud usually appears. That is because this tree never goes fully dormant. Another distinctive characteristic of this tree is its bark. It has a thick, dark gray bark that is divided by furrows into square blocks resembling a checkerboard, sometimes called "alligator bark." Fall leaf color ranges from yellow to orange to bright red.

It can be grown as an ornamental or fruit tree in the home landscape, or in naturalized areas for wildlife. Thus, it can be placed in many types of gardens: a butterfly, children's, native, nighttime, pollinator, or rain garden. With spectacular autumn foliage and fruit that extends the harvest late into the fall, they are an excellent addition to an edible landscape. Fruit can stay on the tree after the leaves have fallen unaffected by freezing temperatures, giving an attractive addition to a winter garden.

Adapted from [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox](#)



Pawpaw is a deciduous, native, understory tree in the Annonaceae family. Its name is probably a modification of the Spanish papaya. It is native to Canada and the eastern U.S.A. where it grows in deep shade to full sunlight in moist, nutrient-rich forests. Trees can be [maintained at 15' tall](#) and can reach 10 to 30 feet high and 8 to 12 feet wide. It will tolerate occasional wet or moist conditions but prefers good drainage and acidic soil.

In spring, 6-petaled, purplish-brown flowers mature. Flowers have both male and female parts but are self-incompatible. A genetically different pollen donor (a pollinizer) is needed for fruit production. In late summer to early fall, pawpaw produces an edible, sweet-tasting, and custard like fruit measuring 2.5 to 6 inches. Harvesting the fruit can be difficult with competition from ambitious wildlife. It is recommended to wear gloves when harvesting as contact dermatitis has been known to occur. The leaves turn a yellow color in the fall and provide interest.

Pawpaw does well in naturalized, riparian, or woodland areas. It is a flowering tree that attracts butterflies, pollinators, small mammals, and songbirds, which makes pawpaw a good addition to a butterfly, pollinator, or rain garden. Flies and beetles are beneficial pollinators attracted to the foul odor of flowers.

Varieties include Shenandoah, Susquehanna, and Rapanoic.

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Canada plum is a native, thicket-forming plum renowned for its fruits, which are made into preserves and jellies. The trees reach 14 feet high and 12 feet wide. Fragrant, white flowers bloom in April to May, before leaf-out, and are visited by a variety of insect pollinators. The plant is a keystone species providing habitat for wildlife.

Habitats include open woodlands, woodland borders, thickets, meadows in wooded areas, areas near bodies of water, and abandoned fields. These habitats include both sandy and non-sandy areas.

The fruit is somewhat sour, clingstone, and very juicy. It can be eaten raw when fully ripe, or cooked and made into pies, preserves and jellies.

Varieties include "Assiniboine" and "Cheney."



The **American Chestnut** is a stately and important tree found in mesic (moderate moisture) and xeric (dry) forests. It once was the most important food and timber tree species in the Eastern hardwood forest. It was almost completely destroyed by a bark fungus accidentally introduced in 1904. Within 40 years, over 30 million acres of chestnut trees were killed from Maine to Georgia and west to the Mississippi. This tragedy has been called the worst ecological disaster in American history.

People have developed trees that are resistant to the fungus by breeding trees that are naturally resistant, [crossing American chestnuts with other species](#) and genetically engineered trees. Our preference is for American blight-resistant trees for this location at VHC. [Blight-resistant American trees](#) can live for 15-20 years, reach 20 to 25 feet high and produce crops of nuts.

