Persimmons

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University
Sporting the golden and orange colors of autumn, persimmons are at their peak during the fall and winter months, specifically, October to February. This edible fruit is often compared with apricots or plums in flavor and texture. If eaten before they are fully ripe, some varieties are known to carry a sharply bitter taste because of heightened levels of tannins, which are the polyphenols also found in tea that give it an astringent taste. When the fruit is fully ripened, the tannins change, replacing the bitter notes with a sweet, alluring flavor accented by undertones of floral, cinnamon or clove.

Long a part of various Asian cuisines, indigenous persimmons were also once prized by Native Americans. While they still grow wild along the East Coast, most of what you will find in the markets are Japanese varieties—Hachiya and Fuyu—that are grown in California and the South. With a crispness level between that of an apple and a pear, persimmons are touted as great replacements for these staple fruits in fall recipes. Most American chefs associate persimmons with sweet applications, such as puddings and preserves; however, they can also be used in a variety of savory applications, such as fresh salsas and salads. They pair well with ham, pork, game, lime, creme fraiche, yogurt, fromage fraise, walnuts, ginger, cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg and honey. They can be poached, dried or puréed, as well as eaten plain. As far as nutrition is concerned, a single persimmon boasts about half the vitamin A and a quarter of the fiber you need each day, making it a contender for not only one of the tastiest but also one of the most nutritious fruits of fall.

Healthy ingredient contribution

**FIBER:** One persimmon meets about ¼ of the daily requirement for dietary fiber. It provides both insoluble fiber and soluble fiber. Insoluble fiber promotes digestive health and regular bowel movements, while soluble fiber forms a gel in the digestive tract that binds cholesterol and removes it from the system.

**MANGANESE:** The manganese you get from persimmons plays a role in developing strong, healthy bones. It is needed for energy metabolism, such as converting carbohydrates, fats and proteins into usable energy for cells.

**PHYTOCHEMICALS:** The peel of persimmons contains proanthocyanidins, which are phytochemicals that prevent aging by protecting cells from oxidative damage associated with the aging process.

**VITAMIN A:** Vitamin A is important for healthy eyesight and support of the immune system. It also promotes normal reproductive function and is needed for manufacturing cells that line the digestive tract.

**VITAMIN C:** Persimmons are also a good source of vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant. Regular consumption of foods rich in vitamin C helps the body develop resistance against infectious agents and scavenge harmful, pro-inflammatory free radicals.

Varieties and uses

**Fuyu:** A smaller, tomato-shaped persimmon, the ripe Fuyu has both red-orange skin and flesh. It is still firm when ripe, but not astringent. Its mellow sweetness and crunchy texture makes it ideal for salads, salsas or eaten alone like an apple.

**Hachiya:** Also called Japanese persimmon and kaki, this is the most widely available persimmon in the United States. It is large (up to 3 inches in diameter) and acorn-shaped, with a shiny, deep-orange skin. Its dark-yellow flesh has a smooth, creamy texture and rich sweetness when ripe. However, when slightly underripe, this variety has an incredible astringency. Hachiyas are most commonly used in baking, and, because they are so soft when ripe, they are often puréed and used in ice creams or quick breads. This variety is excellent for desserts, best for drying, ripens mid- to late-season and is prolific in California.

**Maru:** Also known as Cinnamon persimmon for its spicy color, this subvariety of Hachiya has a golden-orange skin and flesh, the latter speckled with cinnamon-colored flakes. Like the Fuyu, it can be eaten when firm or slightly soft.

**Sharon fruit:** This Israeli persimmon is sweet and round, and is best sliced and eaten when firm. It has a sweet, date-like texture, and is found in Europe and the Middle East.
Persimmons that are not quite ripe can be ripened at room temperature. Once ripe, they are best eaten immediately, but may be stored in the refrigerator in a plastic bag for up to three days. Persimmons that are not quite ripe can be ripened at room temperature.

Ingredients:
1 (16-ounce) loaf French bread, cut into cubes
2 cups fresh persimmon purée, or 6 persimmons, peeled, seeded and mashed
1 lemon, zest and juice
1 cup fat-free evaporated milk
3/4 cup 1% low-fat milk
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
2 large eggs
1 large egg white

Sauce:
3/4 cup packed light-brown sugar
3 tablespoons maple syrup
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
6 tablespoons half-and-half, divided
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon kosher salt

Yield: 12 servings

Nutrition Information
- Calories: 300
- Fat: 3.5g
- Sat. Fat: 2g
- Carbs: 61g
- Sodium: 310mg
- Fiber: 4g
- Sugars: 35g
- Protein: 9g
- Vitamin A: 30%
- Vitamin C: 15%
- Calcium: 15%
- Iron: 10%

Preheat oven to 350° F.

1) Preheat oven to 350° F.
2) To prepare bread pudding: Arrange bread in single layer on baking sheet. Bake at 350° F for 10 minutes or until lightly toasted.
3) Combine persimmon purée and next nine ingredients (through egg white) in large bowl; stir with whisk. Add bread cubes. Let stand 20 minutes, occasionally pressing on bread to soak up milk.
4) To prepare sauce: Combine brown sugar, maple syrup and butter in small saucepan over medium-high heat; bring to a boil. Simmer 2 minutes or until sugar dissolves, stirring frequently. Stir in 5 tablespoons half-and-half; simmer 10 minutes or until reduced to about 1 cup. Remove pan from heat. Stir in remaining half-and-half, vanilla, nutmeg and salt. Keep warm.
5) Pour bread mixture into 2-quart shallow baking dish coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350°F for 35 minutes or until knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Serve warm sauce with bread pudding.