

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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**Memories of Persimmons**

If you don't remember late summer persimmons, probably your parents or grandparents do. Persimmons used to be much more popular when we relied on wild or home grown fruits for part of our diet. They were a forced lesson in patience, since biting into an unripe persimmon brought a mouthful of sourness, but wait long enough and a ripe one is sweet and delicate. These days most of our persimmons are imported Japanese varieties, even though the native ones grow well from here through Illinois.

Further north people can guess when they'll be ripe by waiting until after the first frost. Since we don't have that signal here, we either try them ourselves or wait until someone else pronounces them ready. It's definitely persimmon season now. Two soft ripe persimmons are sitting in my kitchen waiting for dinner tonight, thanks to a generous friend. But with imported fruit we can find them almost year round in the grocery.

Native persimmons are round or oval and range in size from a berry to a plum. Japanese varieties can be round, oval, long and pointed or shaped like an acorn. The color ranges from orange to pinkish to tan. When ripe they are soft under the smooth skin. They are super-easy to handle. You just slice the skin, squeeze out the soft pulp and discard any seeds.

They are worth trying simply for their flavor, but people on low salt or sodium-restricted diets may be especially interested, since a whole raw native persimmon has no sodium at all, and a Japanese variety has only 2 mg. They have lots of potassium,

and a little calcium and phosphorus too, but not much in the way of other minerals. They don't have many calories either. A native persimmon provides only 32 calories and 8.4 g of carbohydrates. Japanese have more, 118 calories and 31 g of carbohydrates in a medium fruit.

They do quite well in the vitamin category, starting with about 5 day's worth of vitamin A in a single fruit. They have twice the vitamin C of a peach or pear and are about the same in other vitamins. Persimmons also provide a lot more fiber than pears or peaches, a nutrient most of us need more of.

As we have lost interest in eating or growing persimmons we have also lost some of the more interesting foods and drinks made with them. Indians mixed persimmons and corn meal to make a bread that resembled gingerbread. Colonists used the juice and pulp to make beer and brandy. Pioneer women made boiled puddings that had enough sugar to preserve them for months.

Now we can preserve the pulp by freezing, or make jam or marmalade for later use. Persimmon sauce over ice cream in February is a delicious reminder of summer's sweetness. Some people use persimmon pulp as a dressing on salads, others combine spoonfuls of the soft pulp with other fruit and add dressing. Because ripe persimmons are so sweet they combine especially well with the more bitter flavored greens such as endive or arugula in salads. And of course some people just cut the top off and eat the soft insides with a spoon, no bowl needed!

Another way to try a persimmon in a familiar food is this week's recipe, persimmon pancakes. You only need one or two fruits, and the sweet mild flavor will blend right in. You don't even have to tell the family they're getting extra nutrition! You can also use this recipe with pureed pumpkin. If you have some leftover after making

the holiday pies, add a touch of cinnamon and hide it in pancakes.

### Persimmon Pancakes

1 cup of ripe persimmon pulp

1 tsp baking powder

1 egg or 2 egg whites

½ tsp baking soda

1 cup flour (use half whole wheat)

enough skim milk to make a thin batter

Remove any seeds in the pulp. Combine all ingredients and stir together to make a thin batter. Bake on a preheated griddle or frying pan with non-stick spray. Serve hot with syrup, or for fewer calories a sprinkle of powdered sugar.

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