

**PERSIMMON TREE**

The persimmon tree belongs to the *Diospyros* genus, Ebenaceae family, has four commercially important species, among them the most important representative is the *Diospyros kaki*. Originated in China had its largest commercial development in Japan, where it is considered a traditional fruit for centuries. In Brazil, the persimmon tree was introduced in the early twentieth century by Japanese immigrants. However, the expansion of this culture only occurred after 1920, with higher expression in the Southeast, with the arrival of Japanese immigrants, who brought other varieties and production techniques.

Brazil is the third largest producer of fruits with 37.6 million tons, distributed in an area of 2.43 million hectares, preceded by China and India. Among the fruits that deserve attention in the national market is the persimmon (*Diospyros kaki* L.) where its worldwide production in 2009 was 3.8 millions of tons. Since that China is the largest producer, producing about 2.5 million tons, followed by South Korea with 530,000 tons and Japan with 266,000 tons, while Brazil came in the fourth place in the world rankings with 173,300 tons.

The South and Southeast regions are the largest producers being led by the state of São Paulo. According to data from the IEA (Institute of Agricultural Economy) in 2007, only the city of Mogi das Cruzes, São Paulo, contributed to the production of 49,700 tons of persimmon.

In the domestic market, consumption is increasing due to the quality and prices, relatively affordable. The interest by the culture is justified, besides its perfect adaptation to the Brazilian conditions; the persimmon is a rustic, vigorous and productive plant. The fruits have a good market acceptance, great taste, appearance and nutritional quality, being a good source of fiber, sugar (14 to 18%), vitamin A, B and C, and minerals.

However, despite being a fruit much appreciated for its taste and nutritional characteristics, presents some commercialization and post harvest problems. Among them is the short harvest period, which begins in May and ends in mid-June, where the great offer undervalues the product, making the crop less profitable. After June prices usually begin to react, however, producers have difficulty to keep up the quality of the fruit until this time. Besides facing competition with more traditional fruits like orange, banana and apple.

Another major problem faced by producers is the detannization of persimmon fruits, and these belong to the variable pollination group, which means that in the absence of seeds, fruit preserves astringency even when mature, requiring, therefore an artificial process for removing astringency.

The concentration of production in a short period of time generates large product offering in the market and leads prices to very low values. Thus, researches related to proper storage of fruits are essential to extend the marketing period, in order to offer the product at a time of the year in which is usually available shortly. Among these practices is the use of refrigerated storage, which maintains the quality of the fruits for a short time, besides researches using wax and modified atmosphere, the use of MCP-1 and recently the use of gamma radiation and calcium application after harvest.

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