

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #36 answer: AMERICAN PERSIMMON (*Diospyros virginiana*)

Sink your teeth into an unripe persimmon, and you will learn what ðastringentö means. Wait until it is ripe for a delicious taste sensation. The scientific name means ðdivine fruit.ö

Exploring the Mississippi in the 16th century, DeSoto was the first European to describe persimmon. Native Americans cultivated it; by 1629 so did the English. The common name comes from Powhatan, an Algonquian language.

The only native Virginia member of the mostly tropical ebony family (Ebenaceae), its highly dense heartwood becomes nearly black in about 100 years. This wood lends exceptional hardness to billiard cues, weaversøshuttles, golf club öwoods,ö shoe lasts, and longbows. It contains a chemical that kills termites.

Persimmon trees bear either pink male flowers or white female flowers, though you might find a perfect flower. The fragrant, nectar-bearing flowers attract many kinds of bees, which carry the pollen from male to female tree. The four big sepals persist on the fruit. Frost-ripened and wrinkled, the fruits are pudding-soft. Birds enjoy them, but they find the seeds too large to ingest. It is up to omnivores to disperse themö bears, foxes, skunks, raccoons, and especially opossums. No wonder it is also known as possumwood.

WILDFLOWER #37

Clues: In an old field or in your living room at Christmas, this familiar tree has much to give.



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