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Persimmons: Drying & Using

Natalia Budillo

UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County

One of the changing landscapes of the American kitchen table has been the increase in the variety of fruits and vegetables available at any given time. Foods previously considered exotic by American standards have become a staple in mainstream grocery stores as well as farmers markets across the country. To me, persimmons are as exotic as anything could be.

I resisted purchasing persimmons as I never really knew how to eat them, nor did I know how they would taste or with what to pair them. My mother made delicious persimmon cookies but how many batches of cookies does anybody need?

It wasn't until after I moved to a new area last year and became acquainted with farmers who grew crops I had no experience with, that I was prodded to give them a try. My friend John gave me a grocery bag of Fuyu persimmons and said, 'Have fun!'

I decided to dry the fruit first. I went to the National Center for Home Food Preservation site <http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/dry.html> which in turn sent me to the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension web site at http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/uga_dry_fruit.pdf.

I peeled and cut the Fuyu persimmons $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, slicing them horizontally to expose a pretty floral fruit pattern. I laid them out in my food dehydrator trays, set the temperature to 140°F and turned on the power. It took between 12 – 15 hours before they were dry enough to remove and store in plastic bags.

Well now, what could I do with them that would be worth the work? A fellow Master Food Preserver suggested, 'anything you make with an apple, you can make with a persimmon.' I began to have fun.

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I have a banana bread recipe I've used for decades and is considered foolproof. I decided to adapt it to rehydrated persimmons. I substituted the same amount of persimmons as called for bananas, but decided to add a little bit of dehydrated and un-reconstituted fruit to the mix as well. I took it to my cousin's house for a trial tasting and everybody loved it! It really was delicious and this first success boosted my confidence.

My next challenge with the dried Fuyu persimmon was to add it to salad. It was November by then and tomatoes from the garden were gone but I wanted to add a little bit of color and flavor to a salad. It was another success!

Natalia's December Salad

One red leaf lettuce head

Green onion

½ cup dehydrated persimmons, cut to desired size and rehydrated with pomegranate balsamic vinegar mixed with orange olive oil.

1 orange, peeled, deveined and cut into chunks.

1 avocado, peeled and chunked

I went very light on the seasonings, preferring instead to let the flavors of the vinegar and oil to shine and to bring out the flavors of the persimmon. I mixed the vinegar and oil to taste and added the persimmons to the mix, allowing them to soak for about 30 minutes. I added this mix to the assembled salad and tossed. It was delicious with a chicken breast brushed with the same sauce. I think a teriyaki chicken would be equally good.

Without a doubt the star of my repertoire was my newly created Persimmon Beet Salad. You might just love me for this recipe! I have had requests for this salad repeatedly and I hope that you, too, will enjoy making it – and eating it.

Natalia's Persimmon Beet Salad

4 red beets, baked at 350°F (about 35 – 40 minutes). Cool and peel. Cut into slices and then cut slices in half again.

1 cup dehydrated persimmons, rehydrated in water with a touch of Grand Marnier. Soak for about an hour.

2-3 green onions sliced on the diagonal

1 Satsuma Mandarin (2 if you prefer) peeled, separated and cut into chunks.

1 whole pomegranate opened and seeds removed and added to salad

¼ cup toasted, sugared almond pieces sprinkled over all

Toss all of the above together and drizzle with orange olive oil and pomegranate balsamic vinegar. Play with it to your taste. Serve with pork, chicken, turkey... or for dessert! It really is that good. The beets will want to release their color; assemble it just before serving.

So there you are, three wonderful recipes to treat your family and friends to by dehydrating persimmons! They are delicious and add flavor and dimension to everything I have made with them.

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Dried persimmons make great holiday gifts. Get more preserved food gift ideas at our free class, *Delightful, Delicious & Decidedly Unique Gifts*, on Saturday, November 18, 2017 from 9am to noon at the UC Cooperative Extension Office, 311 Fair Lane, Placerville, CA, 95667.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message on our helpline at (530) 621-5506. For more information about our public education classes and activities or to make a donation, go to the UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmf>. Sign up to receive our E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.