Tennessee Grower Profile:

Walter Gann

Near Hilham in Overton County, TN

Date of visit: September 12, 2022 County Agent Host: Jason Garrett



UT Extension Specialist for Tree Fruits and Nuts, Dr. David Lockwood, (right), visits with Overton County persimmon grower, Walter Gann, to discuss production and marketing strategies.

Series of grower profiles of selected specialty crops in Tennessee.

- Cut Flowers
- Persimmons
- Blueberries
- Elderberries
- Garlic
- Microgreens

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Chronicling Specialty Crop Marketing in Tennessee

FOCUS ON PERSIMMONS

Rob Holland | Center for Profitable Agriculture | David Lockwood | Department of Plant Sciences

TENNESSEE PERSIMMON MARKET SUMMARY:

According to Census data from the USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, the number of commercial persimmon farmers in the United States increased by 70 percent from 2012 to 2017. With the total number of commercial growers nationwide still relatively low at 2,368, interest in the crop is increasing.

While Tennessee only accounts for 62 of the 2,368 growers nationwide, 2.6 percent, there is increased interest in the crop from growers across our state. In fact, the number of growers in Tennessee increased from 14 in 2012 to 62 in 2017, a four-fold increase. Acreage also also increased significantly from 2 acres in 2012 to 35 acres in 2017. During the same 5-year period, the number of Tennessee counties with Persimmon growers increased from 14 to 34, a 143 percent increase.

The Tennessee counties with the most persimmon growers in 2017 are presented below:

County	Number of Growers in 2017
Coffee	6
DeKalb	5
Hamblen	4
Franklin	3
Lincoln	3

It should be noted that number of growers and number of acres of persimmons reported by the Census of Agriculture does not represent all of the production across the state. There are backyard and hobby growers as well as harvesters of wild persimmons not included in the official USDA count. It is also important to note that persimmons can be divided into two separate

groups: native/American persimmons and Oriental persimmons. Native/American persimmon trees grow wild in most of the South.



The fruit tends to be small, often smaller than a plum, and astringent tasting until overripe. Oriental persimmons, also referred to as Japanese persimmons, Chinese persimmons or kaki, tend to have much larger fruit often reaching the size of a peach. There are both astringent and non-astringent Oriental persimmon varieties. Non-astringent varieties lose their astringency while still on the tree and can be eaten while firm, similar to an apple, or allowed to soften before consumption.

COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FARM

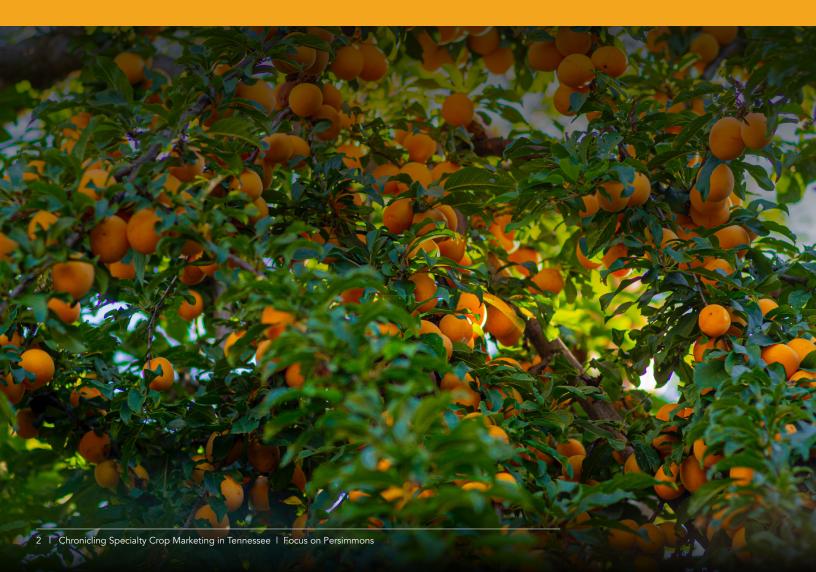
"Crops grown are selected based on what customers ask for and that can be grown without having to fight the weeds – I gave up on squash because the weeds were killing me."

"I'm still learning. Some of the crops are similar and some are drastically different – getting the pH right for each crop has been tricky."

"Disease and pesticide issues are a challenge. I want to grow as organically as I can, but some pests are a real challenge."

"The persimmon trees are from grafts. They are three-year-old plants in their second year here on my farm."

"I hope to have some fruit (persimmons) to sell in two or three years."





- "I realize that pruning is critical – I want strong trees and lots of product (yield)."
- "I'm concerned about deer and racoons – I think I'm going to have to add some wildlife deterrents."
- "I've been selling mostly at farmers markets."
- "I want to sell local."

- "I grow a small amount of several crops – strawberries, blueberries, paw paws, persimmons and peaches."
- "My consumers are willing to try new crops, that's why I added paw paws."
- "I see great potential for persimmons. I've been getting calls about my products and I'm keeping an e-mail list of potential buyers."

- "I started with strawberries and I've been growing for about three years."
- "So far, I've been relying on word of mouth to promote my products."
- "Buyers seem excited that I have some crops that are not commonly found at the grocery store."



Wild American Persimmons in Mid-September on a Tennessee Roadside

