



Apricots

Botanical name: *Prunus armeniaca*

Ripe and golden with a luscious flavor and velvety surface – or a more intense shade when dried – apricots are closely related to peaches, plums, and nectarines. Grown on deciduous trees, they're actually a drupe, with the seed central to the surrounding fruit and each having a fairly uniform size. They're sometimes overlooked as a fruit, perhaps because there are so many fruits to choose from in today's markets.

Already well-known in Greece in 60 BC, apricots were transported to Europe by Greeks who called them “golden eggs of the sun.” Today, apricots' primary commercial operations are in the Mediterranean and Middle East, with off-season offerings from South America or New Zealand. In America, the first apricot tree was first shipped to Virginia in 1720, but orchards in the Spanish missions of California circa 1790 showed how such a climate can proliferate this fruit.

Apricots can be consumed fresh, and can also be a delicious addition to any kind of salad. Dried apricots seem to be the most desired form, and are often mixed with nuts and other dried fruits for a tasty, nutritious homemade trail mix. The pits have their own corner on the market, principally for their bitter oil.

Health Benefits of Apricots

In fresh apricots, the highest level of vitamins is provided by vitamin A – 13% of the daily value in one fruit. This includes several beneficial carotenes, which release powerful antioxidants essential for maintaining your optimal vision, healthy skin and mucous membranes, and for protection against lung and mouth cancers.

Apricots also are a good source of vitamin C, known to ward off vision problems, promote healthy skin and mucous membranes, protect against lung and mouth cancers, and provide even more free radical-scavenging activity in your body. Flavonoids such as lutein and beta cryptoxanthins have such a high degree of benefits that they can actually help slow and even prevent age-related debilities and disease. Zeaxanthin, a carotenoid that absorbs into the retina, provides protective UV-filtering functions that may ultimately protect you against macular degeneration.

Apricots are enriched with a number of other health-promoting phytochemicals. Some have the capability of preventing heart disease by helping keep your cholesterol levels in the normal range, while the dietary fiber keeps your system running smoothly. What's more, the potassium provides compounds in cell and body fluids that help regulate your heart rate and blood pressure.

Summary

Mildly sweet in its fresh form, and chewy and delicious when dried, apricots provide a unique flavor profile to the realm of fruits and vegetables. They're about as versatile as you can get in the kitchen. What apricots offer nutritionally is beneficial as well. Studies have shown that their antioxidant capabilities are linked to healthy skin and mucous membranes, protection against lung and mouth cancers, and fighting infections. Vitamins A and C, along with potassium, carotenoids, and flavonoids like lutein, beta cryptoxanthins, and zeaxanthin can help prevent age-related debilities such as heart disease and macular degeneration and regulate your heart rate and blood pressure by helping keep your cholesterol levels within the normal range.

If it's not very familiar to you as a fruit, start simply with a few fresh apricots. Consume apricots in moderation because they contain fructose which may be harmful to your health in excessive amounts.