

Apricots



Apricots (*Prunus armeniaca*) are drupes or stone fruit prized for their taste and medicinal properties. Cultivated in Armenia and China thousands of years ago, they were favored by the ruling classes and later immortalized in the Turkish adage “the only thing better than this is an apricot in Damascus.”

By the 1700s apricots had spread to Europe and the New World via the Spaniards. Unfortunately, the fruit did not thrive in the colonies, and it wasn't until the trees were planted in California that production and demand grew substantially.

The Golden State is responsible for the vast majority of the U.S. commercial production, followed by Washington, then Utah. Other states (including Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Ohio, Oregon, and Pennsylvania) grow lesser quantities for local harvest and consumption.

References: Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, California Apricot Council, USDA.

SEASONAL AVAILABILITY

LOCATION	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
CALIFORNIA					●	●	●					
UTAH						●	●	●				
WASHINGTON						●	●	●				
CANADA							●	●				
CHILE	●											●

References: Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, California Apricot Council, University of Illinois Extension, USDA, Utah State University Cooperative Extension.

TYPES, VARIETIES & CUTS

Fruit of *Prunus armeniaca* and its related species range in taste from tart to sweet. There are many popular North American varieties including Blenheim, Castlebrite, Earli Autumn, Flavor Giant, Harcot, Improved Flaming Gold, Katy, Modesto, Moongold, Patterson, Perfection, Superb, Titan, Tracy, Veecot, Vivagold, Westley, and Wilson Delicious.

Top varieties for processing include Blenheim, Bonnie, Patterson, Tilton, and Westley.

Plumcots, pluots, and apriums are crosses between apricots and plums, with many cultivars for growers and consumers to enjoy.

More apricots are bound for processing than sent to the fresh market.

References: University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Illinois Extension, University of Minnesota Extension, USDA.

PESTS & DISEASE

Clearing away debris—from dead or diseased wood to leaves and dried fruit—will help prevent and control pests. Spraying trees at the first sign of growth in the spring with horticultural oil will aid in removing insects and any overwinter eggs.

Excess moisture from rain or dew can lead to favorable conditions for a host of viruses and diseases, just as too much heat (sun) can lead to pit burn or premature softening.

Major pests include *aphids*, *citrus cutworms*, *earwigs*, *leafrollers*, *mites*, *peach tree borers*, *oriental fruit moths*, and *plum curculio*. Among the major diseases affecting apricots are *bacterial canker*, *brown rot*, *coryneum blight*, *jacket rot*, *Phytophthora root or crown rot*, and *powdery mildew* which can be treated by various fungicide sprays.

References: University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Illinois Extension, University of Minnesota Extension, USDA.

CULTIVATION, STORAGE & PACKAGING

Preharvest:

Like other stone fruits, apricot trees prefer mild, dry climates with ready irrigation (drip or flood). Soil should be loamy, deep, well-drained, and free of salt and toxins. Fruit requires adequate chill hours (ranging from 600 to 1,000) for the onset of blooms in February or March; unfortunately, spring frosts can kill blossoms. Trees generally begin bearing fruit in the third or fourth year.

Fruit is ready for harvest when firm and skin coloring turns from green to gold or orange. Picking is done by hand (due to a high susceptibility to bruising) in multiple sweeps per day.

Postharvest:

Apricots do produce ethylene when ripening, and exposure will speed up the ripening process. Excessive amounts, however, will cause decay.

Recommended storage is 32 to 36°F, colder temperatures can cause chilling injury, mealiness, and loss of flavor. Temperature management is crucial: under ideal conditions, apricots have a shelf life of little more than a week. Temperatures dipping below 29°F will cause freezing. Fruit subjected to freezing temperatures will become water-soaked and translucent in appearance. If temperatures drop long enough, ice crystals will form in the tissue, rupturing the fruit's cells, which will then collapse, turn brown, and become soft and mushy.

Apricot sizing falls into five categories for shipping: medium (16 per pound), large (14 per pound), extra large (12 per pound), jumbo (10 per pound), and extra jumbo (8 per pound). Single or double-tray packs are usually comprised of 84, 96, or 108 pieces of fruit; some shippers are also using poly bags.

CULTIVATION, STORAGE & PACKAGING — CONTINUED**Grades:**

Apricots are graded as U.S. No. 1 and U.S. No. 2; both stipulate fruit be of one variety, mature and not soft, overripe, and free from major decay or damage. Size is not specified, though fruit in any container should not vary in size more than a quarter inch in diameter.

Quality defects include maturity, shape, color, growth cracks, healed cuts and skin breaks, russeting, scab, scale, and worm holes. Condition defects include bruising, discoloration, firmness, shriveling, storage injury, and bacterial spot and various rots (*alternaria*, *blue* or *grey mold*, *brown*, *Rhizopus*).

References: California Apricot Council, UC Davis Postharvest Technology website, University of Illinois Extension, USDA.

GOOD ARRIVAL GUIDELINES

Generally speaking, the percentage of defects shown on a timely government inspection certificate should not exceed the percentage of allowable defects, provided: (1) transportation conditions were normal; (2) the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) inspection was timely; and (3) the entire lot was inspected.

U.S. Grade Standards	Days Since Shipment	% of Defects Allowed	Optimum Transit Temp. (°F)
10-5-1	5	15-8-3	32
	4	14-8-3	
	3	13-7-2	
	2	11-6-1	
	1	10-5-1	

Canadian good arrival guidelines (unless otherwise noted) are broken down into five parts as follows: maximum percentage of defects, maximum percentage of permanent defects, maximum percentage for any single permanent defect, maximum percentage for any single condition defect, and maximum for decay. Canadian destination guidelines are 15-10-5-10-3.

References: DRC, PACA, USDA.