APRICOT is a drupe, or stone fruit, that belongs to the rosaceae family. There are about a dozen varieties of apricots widely sold throughout the United States. All varieties are similar in taste, but differ somewhat in size and color. Color can range from yellow to deep orange. They are in season from May through July. They are quite delicate and may be harvested before they are ripe to prevent damage during shipping. Ripe apricots are initially sweet with a slightly tart finish and a juicy, tender mouthfeel.

The origins of apricot is highly disputed. They are native to parts of Asia. Trade routes, exploration and time would spread the fruit from Asia into Europe and eventually the New World. Most New World apricots are of European origins. Central Asian apricots are still relatively new to North American growers as they do not have the visual appeal of plumper European varieties. Yet, they are often considered the more delicious in fruit flavor and texture. Apricot trees are disease resistant and do not respond well to fertilizers. Fertilizers encourage weak growth and make trees more susceptible to disease and insects. The trees love full sun, hot dry summers and sheltered cool to cold but frost-free winters. Fruits will crack under humid, wet conditions.

Due to its health benefits, apricots are considered a super-food. They are low in calories and high in vitamins and minerals. Apricots do not contain saturated fat, sodium, or cholesterol. Apricots are a great source of vitamin A, which aids in improving eye health.
HEALTHY INGREDIENT CONTRIBUTION

Values from NutritionData.com based on apricots, raw, halves, one cup (155 grams)

VITAMIN A: Apricot provides 60 percent of the recommended daily value of vitamin A, which is essential for healthy eyes, bones and teeth. The antioxidant properties of vitamin A combat free radicals that can damage the skin.

VITAMIN C: One serving of apricot contains 26 percent of the recommended daily value of vitamin C, a water-soluble vitamin that functions as an antioxidant. Vitamin C helps the body develop resistance against infection and promotes a healthy immune system.

DIETARY FIBER: One serving of apricot supplies 12 percent of the daily recommended value of dietary fiber. Soluble fibers help control weight by making the stomach feel full, and insoluble fibers add bulk to the diet and help prevent constipation.

POTASSIUM: Apricots contain 11 percent of the daily recommended value of potassium. This mineral is important for electrolyte balance, which in turn affects heart rhythm, fluid balance and nerve function.

VITAMIN E: (Alpha Tocopherol) Seven percent of the daily recommended value of vitamin E can be found in one serving of apricots. This fat-soluble vitamin strengthens the immune system, widens blood vessels, which helps reduce the risk of blood clots.

TYPES AND VARIETIES

While there are many varieties of apricots, Blenheim, Perfection, Katy, Wenatchee Moorpark, and Tilton are among the better known.

BLENHEIM: Medium to large apricot with thick yellow-orange flesh, very juicy fruit with sweet, sprightly, and aromatic flavor. This is the classic California apricot. Eat out of hand or use for canning. Early to midseason harvest.

KATY: Large apricot with red-blushed skin and deep yellow flesh; freestone flesh is firm mild and sweet. Early harvest.

PERFECTION (GOLDBECK): Fruit is large, oval to oblong, light yellow–orange skin with a pebbly appearance; yellow to yellow-orange flesh. Early harvest.

TILTON: Large to very large apricot with orange skin yellow-orange flesh; fair flavor. Use fresh. Midseason harvest.

WENATCHEE MOORPARK: Large to oval apricot with orange-yellow flesh and skin. Strong flavor. Midseason harvest.

SELECTING AND STORING

- To select ripe apricots, look for fruit with a rich, orange color (not pale yellow or green) and are a little soft to the touch.
- Refrigerating apricots will dramatically impair their ripening process. Leave them out at room temperature until they are ripe, then refrigerate them.
- Some varieties are so delicate that they cannot be shipped. This delicate nature causes most apricots to be processed. Apricots are often cooked, canned, or dried before sold.

CULINARY USES

- Like all stone fruit, they are an excellent filling for pies and tarts.
- Dried apricots make a great snack or garnish for salads
- Apricots flavor jam, marmalade, syrup, and jelly.
- There is an Egyptian drink known as amar al-din. This drink is made from apricots. First, the apricots are dried. Then, a sweetener is added to the dried fruits and then the drink is made out of it.

INTERESTING FACTS

- California produces about 95% of apricots in the United States.
- In Latin, the apricot is called praecocquum, which means “early-ripening peach.”
- In the US, National Apricot Day is observed on January 9 every year.
- Astronauts ate apricots on the Apollo Moon mission.