

CONSUMER CORNER

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Apricots – One of Summers Most Delicate Fruits

In Latin, apricot means "precious," a label earned because it ripens earlier than other summer fruits. A relative of the peach, the apricot is smaller and has a smooth, oval pit that falls out easily when the fruit is halved. Apricots originally came from China. This golden fruit has been around for more than 4,000 years.

Selection and Storage: Look for plump apricots with as much golden orange color as possible. Stay clear of fruit that is pale yellow, greenish-yellow, very firm, shriveled, or bruised. Apricots that are soft-ripe have the best flavor, but they must be eaten immediately.

Apricots will ripen at room temperature. To help them ripen, place them in a paper bag with an apple. When they yield to gentle pressure, they are ready to eat. Refrigerate ripe apricots, unwashed, in a paper or plastic bag up to 2 days. Wash them before eating. Fresh California apricots are found in the grocery store mid-May to early July. Washington apricots are available mid-July to mid-August.

What about Dried Apricots? The nutrients (e.g., beta-carotene and niacin) are more concentrated in dried than in fresh apricots. Dried apricots also have a higher sugar content, which makes them more likely to stick on your teeth. If you're allergic or sensitive to sulfites, remember to look on the label of the package to see if the apricots were treated with sulfur dioxide for color preservation. Look in health-food stores for apricots that were not treated with sulfites. They'll be brown, not orange. Apricots are great to eat raw, but they are also terrific cooked. These are some common cooking methods:

Broiling or grilling: Try threading the apricots (whole or halved) on skewers. Brush them with a little honey, and grill until semi-soft. Broiling apricots is easy. Simply halve the apricots, place them on a cookie sheet with the skin down and the cut side up, and heat for 7 to 10 minutes.

Poaching: It's a great method for making a delicious sauce. Simply place the apricots with their skins intact into simmering water or fruit juice, and cook until tender. Adding spices such as cinnamon or cloves enhances the apricot taste. When the apricots are tender, the poaching liquid can be used as a sauce. Poaching takes about 6 to 8 minutes.

Apricot Bars

1 c. oatmeal, uncooked
1 c. all-purpose flour
One third c. brown sugar
One half tsp. cinnamon
One fourth tsp. salt
One fourth tsp. baking soda



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One third c. canola oil
5 T. apple juice, divided
One half c. apricot jam
1 (7 oz.) pkg. dried apricots, diced

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9x9-inch baking dish with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, mix together oatmeal, flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, salt, and baking soda.
3. In a small bowl, whisk oil and 3 tablespoons juice together and pour over oat mixture. Mix well.
4. Reserve three fourths cup crumb mixture for topping.
5. Press the remaining crumb mixture evenly into prepared baking pan.
6. In a small bowl, blend jam with remaining 2 tablespoons of juice. Stir in dried apricots.
7. Spread apricot mixture evenly over crust. Sprinkle reserved crumb mixture over apricots. Bake for 35 minutes or until golden brown. Cool in pan on wire rack. Cut into bars.

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 160, Total Fat 5 g, Saturated Fat 0 g, Cholesterol 0 mg, Sodium 65 mg, Total Carbohydrate 28 g, Dietary Fiber 1 g.

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