

## Daily Dish

### Summer Fruit: Apricots

Apricots are sweet, delicious fruits rich in beta-carotene, potassium, and fiber. They're mainly grown in California, with only 16 percent of the crops sold fresh because they are fragile and don't ship well (luckily, the dried varieties are easy to find).

Fresh apricots are generally available from mid-May to mid-August, but imports from Chile and New Zealand may appear in stores during December and January. Apricots can be enjoyed once you hit Phase 2 of the South Beach Diet.

#### Buying

Unless you buy them at a farmers' market, most fresh apricots are sold unripened. Look for fruit that is plump, firm, and orange-gold in color. Avoid those that are hard and with any hint of green — these will never develop full flavor. All apricots, ripe or unripe, should yield to gentle pressure and have a sweet fragrance. In addition, check for velvety skins without bruises or shriveling. As for dried apricots, you'll find a wide variety in the market. Most dried apricots are treated with sulfur dioxide to retain their orange color. If you are allergic to sulfites or want to avoid this additive, you can buy untreated apricots in health-food stores. Be advised that canned apricots may contain added sugar.

#### Storing

Unripe apricots should be stored in a paper bag, away from heat or direct sunlight, at room temperature for two to three days. After they ripen, you can store them in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. They will keep refrigerated for no more than two days. Avoid washing the fruit until you're ready to eat it.

#### Preparing

Always rinse fresh apricots in cold water before eating. To remove the skins for a recipe, drop them in boiling water for 15 to 20 seconds; then cool them under cold water. You can use a knife to gently pull away the skin. Fresh apricots can be eaten like any other fruit, but beware of the small pit in the center. To keep cut apricots from browning, simply dip them in diluted lemon juice. For a special treat, try grilling or broiling fresh apricots. Then serve the apricots with skinless chicken breast or other lean meats for a delicious yet unexpected side dish — or even as dessert. Enjoy!