

Want apricots? Plant bareroot now....

Plump, golden, sweet apricots, ripe for picking, summer through fall. A tantalizing vision for chilly winter days. But it's actually when you should be thinking of them if you're up for growing your own. It's bareroot season – the time of year when deciduous trees and shrubs are dormant and available with “bare” (aka no soil) roots. Nurseries will be bursting with available plants, and offering a wide range of varieties.

Apricots are relatively easy to grow and start bearing fruit in the third or fourth year. The moderate-sized standard tree averages 15 - 20 feet tall and produces fruit for 20-25 years. The flowers adorn the tree in late winter, with small baby pink to white blooms, followed by medium green foliage. Apricots are self-pollinating so you only need one tree. Fruit is harvested spring – summer depending on variety.

Like its relatives the plum and peach, the apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*) produces fruit with a hard inner seed – the pit or “stone” – surrounded by fleshy fruit. They are one of the healthiest and most beneficial fruits available, rich in beta-carotene, vitamins A and C, potassium, iron, copper and lycopene and also high in fiber. Apricots are delicious plucked ripe off the tree, canned, or dried.

While people might think of apricots as a "subtropical" fruit, they are believed to have originated in China and actually need a chilling period (600 – 900 hours below 45°F) to flower and fruit properly. Apricots perform best when planted in a sunny location with well-drained soils at least 4 to 6 feet deep. As they bloom in February and early March, pollination may be limited during cold rainy weather; they're also susceptible to damage from late spring frosts. For abundant fruit, go easy on pruning. The fruit is produced on short spurs from the prior season's growth; it will continue to produce on the spurs for up to four years. Thin fruit in mid-spring, leaving 2 – 4 inches between fruits. Prune in summer after harvesting fruit to prevent dieback.

There are many different varieties of apricots to choose from; the table below includes varieties recommended for our general climate. Apricots are also readily hybridized with other stone fruits – there's the plumcot, a cross between the apricot and plum (50% each parent), the aprium - 75% apricot and 25% plum and the pluot, a 75% plum and 25% apricot fruit.

Variety	Maturity	Comments
Gold Kist	Early season	Medium to large fruits; excellent quality; freestone
Castlebrite	Early season	Large, orange-red fruit; excellent flavor; freestone
Patterson	Mid-season	Medium-large, firm fruit; not the most flavorful of the cultivars, but consistent producer
Royal (Blenheim)	Mid-season	Large fruit with excellent flavor and sweetness; used for eating and drying
Tilton	Mid-season	Medium size fruit with excellent flavor; used for canning
Autumn Royal	Late season	Blenheim sport; ripens in late summer to fall
Moorpark	Late season	Large fruit and great flavor. Fruit may ripen unevenly



Fruit tree leaf rollers and peach tree borers are insect pests that can be minimized with good cultural and sanitation practices. Keep trees growing strong and vigorous; cut and remove all dead or diseased wood and dried fruit and clear leaves and fallen debris away from trees. Spray with horticultural oil while the tree is dormant. For borers, where damage is found primarily in the crown area or lower part of the trunk above or just below the soil line, remove the borers through a technique called worming during fall, winter, or early spring; treatment of trunks with insecticides or parasitic nematodes can also be effective.

Brown rot affects all stone fruits and can be very destructive. The fungus *Monilinia fructicola* causes blossom blight, twig blight, branch canker and brown rot as the fruit approaches maturity. In addition to garden sanitation, avoid wetting blossoms, foliage, and fruit when irrigating and plant varieties that are least susceptible. Applications of copper-containing fungicides or synthetic fungicides such as

myclobutanil at pink bud stage can help avoid serious losses.

So, pick out a good location in your garden, prepare the planting area, and head to your nearest nursery to find a bareroot apricot tree – before you know it, you’ll be savoring those delectable sweet fruits, right in your own back yard.

By Nanette Londeree