



The plum is a drupe—a pitted fruit—related to the nectarine, peach, and apricot, but the plum is far more diverse than its relatives, coming in a wider range of shapes, sizes and especially skin colors. Its flavors also vary from extremely sweet to quite tart.

## Facts

There are more than 140 varieties of plums sold in the United States.

Some plum varieties are specifically bred so that they can be dried and still retain their sweetness, and these are used for prunes (The Wellness Encyclopedia of Food and Nutrition).

Plums grow in clusters and have smooth, richly colored skins.

The domestic plum season extends from May to October, beginning with the Japanese varieties and ending with the European types.

## History

Although plums are native to several temperate regions around the world, including North America, early colonists brought European varieties with them that supplanted native American plums. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, dozens of varieties from Europe and Asia were cultivated in the United States, primarily in California.

The California French plum is a descendant of the first prune plums brought to California from France by Louis Pellier in the 1850s.

## Where Grown

About 70 percent of the world's prune supply and nearly 100 percent of the domestic prunes come from California.

## Types

About twenty varieties dominate the commercial supply of plums and most are either Japanese or European varieties. Japanese are the nonprune plums or salicina plums. Originally from China, these plums were introduced into Japan more than 300 years ago. Most varieties have yellow or reddish flesh that is quite juicy and skin colors that range from crimson to black-red. They are also clingstone fruits—that is, their flesh clings to the pit. Santa Rosa and Red Beauty are two of the more popular varieties. Elephant heart is a large red-fleshed variety that is good for cooking. Plums are also used for their juice and often jam or thick syrup is made out of it.

### Sources:

Encyclopedia of Foods: A Guide to Healthy Nutrition. Dole Food Company: 2002.

5 A Day, Fruit and Vegetable of the Month: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/5ADay/month/index.htm>

SEPTEMBER – Featured Vegetable: PLUM



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European-type plums are smaller, denser and less juicy than Japanese varieties; their skin color is always blue or purple and their pits are usually freestone, meaning they separate easily from the flesh. The flesh is a golden yellow color. These are the plums made into prunes; a few varieties are sold fresh and called fresh prunes or purple plums. Among the better known varieties are Italian, President, Empress, Stanley, and Tragedy. Damson plums are a small-tart European-type variety used mainly for preserves.

## Nutrients

- Plums are a good source of vitamin C
- Prunes (dried plums) are a good source of vitamin A (carotenes) and fiber and contain isatin, a natural laxative

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