

MARCH – Featured Fruit: RAISINS



OPEN BOX. EAT.



(how easy is that?)



Hello, I'm Ray Raisin, the raisin expert!¹

I'm here to fill you in on all the coolest stuff about raisins. I may come in a box, but I'm not a square, so come along with me on the most exciting raisin adventure around! And when we're finished exploring raisins, guess who will be a raisin expert too? That's right, it will be you!

Facts

Raisins – comes from the Latin word "racemus" meaning: a cluster of grapes or berries.

It is believed that in ancient times, humans discovered raisins when they happened upon grapes drying on a vine.

Phoenicians and Armenians traded raisins with the Greeks and Romans, and the dried fruit became a favorite.

Greeks and Romans decorated places of worship with raisins and handed them out to winners in sporting contests.

Roman physicians prescribed raisins to cure anything from mushroom poisoning to old age.

With their growing appeal came an increase in value. In fact, two jars of raisins could be traded for one slave in Ancient Rome.

It takes at least three years to produce the first crop of raisins from the time a vine is planted to its initial yield.

Seventy-five percent of grapes are eaten at breakfast.

California produces 95 percent of all raisins in the United States and about 50 percent of the raisins in the world.

History

The first raisins were probably grapes that had dried naturally on the vine. More than 3000 years ago, people were making raisins by picking grapes and laying them out in the sun to dry. The Egyptians discovered the principle of sun-drying fruits. Today, raisins that are sun-dried still go through a very similar process.

Source: ¹Dole 5 A Day. www.dole5aday.com

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About 1000 years ago, travelers to the Middle East brought raisins back to Europe. They were a precious trade item in the Near East and also highly valued in ancient Rome. Did you know over 200 years ago, Queen Isabella of Spain (who sent Christopher Columbus off to America), sent Spanish missionaries with raisins to Mexico and California?

In the San Joaquin Valley of California, the raisin industry began booming in the 1870s after a heat wave dried the grape crop on the vine. Farmers found the best spot for growing raisins near Fresno in the San Joaquin Valley. Today, 95 percent of all raisins grown in the United States come from California, within 50 miles of Fresno. California supplies much of the world's raisin market.

Where Grown

The raisin industry began booming in California in the 1870s after a heat wave dried the grape crop on the vine. Farmers found the best spot for growing grapes for raisins near Fresno in the San Joaquin Valley. The San Joaquin Valley is located in central California.

Types

Raisins produced in the United States are made from five different types of grapes; natural seedless, dipped natural seedless, golden seedless, zante currants, and Muscat raisins.

Natural Seedless: These raisins are sun-dried Thompson Seedless grapes. They are the most well-known and account for 95 percent of California raisins. Natural Seedless raisins are most often eaten out of hand.

Dipped Natural Seedless: These raisins are spa-treated or dipped Thompson Seedless grapes. They are moist and plump. These raisins are also popular for baking.

Golden Seedless: Like Natural Seedless raisins, these are also Thompson Seedless grapes. They are specially treated to preserve their light color. They account for about 5 percent of the crop and are good for baking.

Zante Currant: Made from small Black Corinth grapes, currants are seedless and very dark in color. These tiny fruits called "Zante Currants" refer to the Greek island where this type of grape first grew. They are also popular for baking.

Muscat Raisins: These raisins are made from big, greenish-gold Muscat grapes. Since the grapes contain seeds, the raisins are seeded mechanically, or are sold with seeds. Muscats are large, brown, and particularly fruity-tasting. They are mostly used in baking, especially in fruitcakes.

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