

Apricots: Harvesting and Processing



Turkey is the world's largest producer of apricots (*Prunus armeniaca*) with most coming from the Malatya region. A mild to warm, dry climate is necessary in order for apricot orchards to thrive. Irrigation is also important for healthy, thriving apricot trees since it helps to reduce the risk of microbiological issues, i.e. the spread of disease or fungus. Apricot trees begin to blossom in spring and by early summer picking season is underway, which lasts about two to three weeks every year and the fruit is picked about 3 times within this period. The weather during this time is crucial (particularly during the bloom) as a late frost can kill/damage the flowers and potentially damage fruit. However, too high temperatures can also have a negative effect on the trees and fruit.

Harvesting can be done by hand, where workers pick the fruit off of the trees themselves, or it can be done mechanically with a 'trunk shaker' that grabs the tree trunks and vigorously shakes the fruit from the tree. Mechanical harvesting can cause more bruising to the raw fruit as they fall from the tree, however it can speed up the picking process. The collected fruit are loaded into crates and taken to the factory where they might be put through a water bath for initial **cleaning**.

They are next hand sorted to remove any visual foreign bodies, such as leaves or twigs that could have come in from the orchards with the apricots. At this time, they may be blast chilled. The apricots will also go through a **sorting** process to determine which of them will be used for fresh produce, canned fruit, dried fruit, etc. depending on the factory.

The apricots that are chosen for use as a dried product are then exposed to a SO₂ solution by burning the sulphur in treatment rooms (unless specified for a non-SO₂ product and a similar effect can be seen with blanching). This solution is applied because it inhibits enzymes which would brown and further ripen the fruit. This maintains the apricots current state and allows for a certain stability during storage. After this, they are left to **dry**. Turkish apricots are dried whole while apricots from the United States are typically halved before drying. Drying can be done either by sun, or in a dehydrator or oven. It is common practice to sun dry in Turkey which is said to produce dried fruit with a more vibrant colour, however, it is also common to use an oven for this process. The apricots are **pitted** during the drying process. Ideally this is done when the fruit is semi-dried and the flesh has separated from the stone/pit.

After drying the apricots may go through another **sorting** process. They will be washed and visually inspected for any dirt or foreign material that could have come in from the drying area, especially if dried outside. After this they will be transferred to the final drying process, which is commonly done in a drying oven. From here they will then move on to **packing**. The goods are packed in cartons and are given a final metal detection before being released for dispatch.

Resources

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0961953402001162>
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