

October 19: Plums- Food and Nutrition V1014

Plums are fleshy fruits that have a single seed within a tough shell. They belong to a family known as drupes that also include cherries, peaches, mango, and olives. After many centuries of cultivation and hybrid development, there are now over 2,000 varieties of plums all over the world. Plums are best known to have a deep purple color but can also come in white, yellow, green, and red varieties. Plums provide an abundance of nutrients for very few calories. They provide antioxidants and phytonutrients like flavonoids and carotenoids. Anthocyanin is a flavonoid in plums that provides humans the nutrients and provides the plum its color.

Plums can be eaten on their own when ripe and can be enjoyed multiple ways. Plums are typically sweet and combine well with bold, savory ingredients. Chop plums and combine them with soy sauce, garlic and ginger to create a unique salsa. Much like peaches, plums also make a delightful warm treat. Slice plums and roast them flesh side down. Heating the flesh of the fruit caramelizes the natural sugar present in the fruits.

A ripe plum feels heavy and will yield to slight pressure at the bottom side, end opposite of the stem. To extend their shelf life a few days, store ripe fruit in the refrigerator. Oppositely, keep unripe plums at room temperature to allow them to soften. Over soft, mushy, or cracked plums are usually past their prime. Both flavor and texture will lose their appeal. If you have an abundance of ripened plums, you may consider removing the pits, slicing or chopping, and freezing. Plums will store in the freezer for up to 12 months.

Plums grow on trees and can withstand cold temperatures. They are pretty low maintenance plants after they've been established but may not produce fruit for three to six years. Trees usually bloom late winter or early spring and bear fruit from May to September.

As we are moving out of plums' peak growing season, you may choose to experiment with their dried version. Prunes can be eaten individually or pureed into other recipes. Prune puree is sometimes used as an alternative to oil or applesauce when baking. Prunes contain pectin, sorbitol and malic acid, which add volume and moisture and enhance flavor. These components enhance flavor or baked goods by trapping air and contributing to a smooth mouthfeel. Another benefit worth mentioning on behalf of these dried fruits is their reputation for aiding bowel regularity.