

You are viewing one of thousands of biographies – click below for more, including Search box and access to Plant associated organisations.

[Plant Biographies](#)

[Bibliography](#)

---

### *Prunus armeniaca*

[Synonyms : *Amygdalus armeniaca*, *Armeniaca communis*, *Armeniaca vulgaris*, *Prunus armeniaca* var. *vulgaris*]

**APRICOT** is a deciduous tree. Native to northern China it has small dusky-red tinged, white flowers with many stamens.

It is also known as *Abricoqueiro* (Brazilian), *Abricot* (French), *Abricotier* (French), *Abricotier commun* (French), *Abrikoos* (Dutch), *Abrikos* (Danish, Russian), *Aci baden ag* (Turkish), *Albaricoque* (Spanish), *Albaricoquero* (Spanish), *Al barqouq* (Arabic), *Albicocca* (Italian), *Albicocco* (Italian), *Al birqûq* (Arabic), *Albricoqueiro* (Brazilian), *Alpercheiro* (Brazilian), *Anzu* (Japanese), *Aprikhot* (Thai), *Apricoock*, *Aprikoosi* (Finnish), *Aprikos* (Swedish), *Aprikose* (German), *Aprikosen* (German), *Aprikosträd* (Swedish), *Armellini* (Italian), *Badam* (Malaysian), *Barille* (German), *Berquqa* (Maltese), *Common apricot*, *Damasco* (Portuguese), *Damasqueiro* (Brazilian), *Echte Aprikose* (German), *Gurdlu* (Punjabi), *Hsing* (Chinese), *Khubani* (Hindi), *Mandorio amaro* (Italian), *Marhul'a obyčajná* (Slovak), *Marille* (German), *Meliaco* (Italian), *Meruňka obecná* (Czech), *Mish-mish* (Arabic), *Mơ* (Vietnamese), *Qaisi* (Kurdish), *Seiyou anzu* (Japanese), *T'ien-mei* (Chinese), *Wild apricot*, and *Zard-alu* (Persian); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of doubt.

There are sweet and bitter varieties of apricot.

Essential oil is extracted from the fruit kernels.

Warning – the fruit stones are poisonous.

*Armeniaca* means 'of or from Armenia in western Asia'.

According to some authorities in the eyes of the Romans the fruit's early ripening led to them christening it with the name *praecocium* (meaning 'precocious') and this is held to be the root of the name Apricot.

The apricot has grown in the hills around Peking in northern China for thousands of years. It is likely that the Chinese were cultivating it as early as 2200 BC.

Apricot's progress to the West is still open to debate. Some authorities contend that it moved westward with Pompey's (106-48 BC) soldiers who were in Armenia in 66 BC. (Hence its botanical name *armeniaca*.) Pompey was the statesman and Roman soldier who in his later exploits took his men and captured the King of Armenia, Tigranes I (967-557 BC) who had tried audaciously to annex Syria and Cappadocia under the Roman Empire's nose. Other authorities point out that apricots were being grown in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. [At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries there are some authorities who debate the existence of Babylon's Hanging Gardens at all.] Its name could therefore be derived from the Babylonian-Assyrian name for it *armanu* and that it is therefore equally likely that the fruit were introduced to Europe by the Arabs. These anomalies notwithstanding it is believed that the apricot appeared in Armenia, Tibet, northern India and Persia (now Iran) directly from China and that however it reached Rome it was from there that the fruit spread through Europe. Records show that by the 8<sup>th</sup> Century Syria was home to 21 varieties.

Although some authorities suggest the ancient Greeks did not know of the apricot others claim that they called the small yellow-orange fruit 'golden egg of the sun' (the Persians called

them ‘eggs of the sun’). Certainly the Romans knew them and could have imported them together with other foodstuffs from Armenia (hence again the name *armeniaca*). Authorities still debate whether the trees were actually cultivated by the Romans (aside from the fruit being imported) and when they were first planted in Italy. Some believe plants may have appeared there after Pompey’s (106-48 BC) Armenian campaign in the 60s BC as already indicated while others think that Roman cultivation of them could have begun under Nero’s (37-68) rule in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> Century (one hundred odd years later). Apricots seem to have been lost to Europe with the fall of the Roman Empire (and the concomitant disruption to lines of communication) – apart from those that came to be cultivated by the Moors on the Spanish Grenada plains from about the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. The Middle Ages saw the European Continent accusing the apricot of being the cause of fever thus on the Continental mainland it was not really until the 17<sup>th</sup> Century that the fruit began to be cultivated in any quantity there – in the south of France (notwithstanding the fact that the fruit had been familiar in that region even in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century). Meanwhile the apricot had been introduced to England from Italy in 1542 while Henry VIII was on the throne. His gardener, Jean le Loup (anglicised to John Wolf) who was a French priest, brought a variety with him from Italy. Fruiting was found to be a problem in this colder climate nevertheless other varieties were gradually introduced and one of these which appeared in 1621 arrived under the auspices of the famed John Tradescant the Elder (1570-c.1638) who was to become head gardener to Charles I (1600-1649). Authorities note that fruiting success was only achieved in England in the following Century and by 1782 there were no less than 14 varieties in that Country (as witnessed by William Pinkerton’s catalogue of that year).

An interesting point arises from the believed date of the introduction of this fruit tree to England. It has been pointed out that if it did arrive during Henry VIII’s reign the famous English bard, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was in error in one of the three references he makes to the Apricock. This is when he mentions the fruit tree in *Richard II*

Go, bind thou up yond dangling apricocks,  
Which, like unruly children, make their sire  
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight:  
Give some supportance to the bending twigs. -

as it would not have been growing in the Country in the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century when Richard was King.]

Although some historians have stated that the apricot reached North America by the 16<sup>th</sup> Century others believe it only arrived there early in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with the Mission Fathers who introduced the tree to California (in the south-western United States) – possibly from Mexico where it had arrived earlier at the hands of the Spaniards. (There may well have been a coincidental pincer movement on the southern North American States in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century as the fruit is believed to have reached Virginia then as well.) When ever the apricot reached that Continent the fresh fruit came to be eaten by both the Keresan and the Hopi North American Indians – and the former also dried and stored them for Winter food.

Like some other plants apricot acquired a name for encouraging longevity. The French author, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757) is claimed to have attributed his 100 years in part to eating plenty of apricots – advice that he believed he had obtained from his grandmother.

The fruit are eaten fresh, cooked or preserved (salted, dried in various ways or smoked). They can be made into puddings, added to savoury dishes such as the traditional Arab *mishmishya* (apricots and lamb) or made into jam and other preserves such as the traditional conserve from South Africa *meebos*. (This last involves a special process of

drying and pressing the fruit over several days and the sheets of dried apricot are stored layered with sugar.) Authorities have also noted that in country areas in India for example (especially in the Himalayan region) the seeds have been pressed for cooking oil.

Apparently dormice are especially partial to the fruit.

Today in the United States the kernels of some apricot species are used as a substitute for those of bitter almonds (*Prunus dulcis* var. *amara*) as the latter are banned there.

On a commercial basis today the bitter kernels are used by the drinks industry, particularly in liqueurs eg. apricot brandy (in Hungary called *barack pálinka*), *eau de noyaux*. They are also used by the confectionery industry as a substitute for bitter almonds (*Prunus dulcis* var. *amara*), and provide an ingredient for the cosmetics industry eg. in cold creams, and the toiletry industry eg. in soaps and shampoos, and the perfumery industry.