

*Prunus mume*

[Synonyms : *Armeniaca mume*, *Prunus mume* var. *tonsa*]

**JAPANESE APRICOT** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to China it has small, sweetly fragrant white or dark pink flowers before leaves.

It is also known as *Abricot du Japon* (French), *Abricotier japonais* (French), *Albaricoquero Japonés* (Spanish), *Albicocco del Giappone* (Italian), *Albicocco giapponese* (Italian), *Boir* (Thai), *Damasqueiro da China* (Portuguese), Drooping apricot, Flowering apricot, Flowering plum, *Foung* (Thai), Japanese flowering apricot, Japanese plum, *Japaninaprikoosi* (Finnish), *Japanische Aprikose* (German), *Japanischer Aprikosenbaum* (German), *Japansk abrikos* (Danish), *Maihwa* (Korean), *Mei* (Chinese), *Mó hoaváng* (Vietnamese), *Mume* (Japanese), *Mumebaum* (German), *Ume* (Japanese), *Ume no mi* (Japanese), and *Umeo* (Esperanto).

Warning - unripe fruit may be poisonous.

*Mume* is derived from a Japanese name for a *Prunus* species, *ume*.

The Chinese pickle the small apricot-like, bitter-tasting greenish-yellow fruit as an accompaniment with rice (*Oryza*) and also use them for making the traditional ‘plum sauce’ associated with Chinese cookery in the West. In Japan the fruit have long been used not only to make a liqueur known as *umeshu* but also specially salted and dried for traditional preserved foods called *umeboshi*. These have been prized as a vegetable or relish (particularly for some invalid and convalescent dishes) and some authorities have claimed that they rank among the oldest Japanese preserved foods.

Japanese apricot is cultivated widely as an ornamental plant, not least in China and Japan – and has received the attentions of both bonsai experts and flower arrangers.

For the Chinese the plant is a symbol of strength in adversity because of its resilience in harsh winter weather. It is a favourite subject in Chinese art and was the inspiration for a classic Chinese decorative motif on porcelain.

Taiwan adopted the flower as a national symbol in July 1964.

Some authorities contend that Japanese apricot was probably introduced to Japan from China in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century while others claim that it is native to south-western Japan (as well as to China). Eulogised in the oldest known collection of Japanese poetry, the *Manyooshuu*, the plant’s lasting popularity in that Country is undoubted – and has even been declared the official tree or flower of four of the Japanese prefectures. For the Japanese it is the traditional Winter-flowering ‘plum blossom’ often depicted in illustrations..Some records have stated that the Japanese have developed over 250 cultivated varieties of the wild species.

Japanese apricot was introduced to North America in 1844.

According to south-eastern Asian authorities Japanese apricot is primarily of interest in the region as a source of medicine.

Medicinally, oriental herbalists have turned to the plant for the internal treatment of coughs, dysentery, diarrhoea and worms, and externally for various skin infections.