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The History Of Almond Tree, 'Prunus Dulcis'

By Pat Malcolm

The ancient travelers and traders, who circulated back and forth over the Silk Road route between

Greece and Turkey, used almonds in their commercial trading, in exchange for other expensive and desirable goods. Native almond trees, 'Prunus dulcis,' are found growing in Western Asia, and biblical references suggest that almond nuts have been grown in Israel since 2000 B.C. from time immemorial in the ancient land of Canaan; according to the book of Numbers in the Testament. Other references to almonds in the Bible are found in the books of Genesis, Ecclesiastes, and Jeremiah. The Old Testament Bible records the fact of Aaron's staff blossoming and developing into edible almonds, suggested that this divine miracle expressed the approval of God to Aaron and his brother, Moses as acceptable leaders of the Israelites.

Researchers believe that the almonds available on today's markets evolved from an ancient plant in China (Mongolia) that had a bitter kernel, much like the peach kernel. Through selective growing over the centuries, kernels appeared that demonstrated a characteristic sweet, spicy, crunchiness that U.S. almond tree growers prefer over bitterness.

In recent years, almond nuts harvested from trees in California have become an excellent product of considerable importance. The first almond trees sent to the new world to America from Spain in the mid 1700's by Franciscan monks were planted in Spanish monasteries near Sacramento, California. Almond trees are closely related to other stone fruits, such as the cherry, peach, and plum, but it is the stone that forms the food product from the almond, but the fleshy substance that surrounds the pit. The leaves on almond trees are dark green, much like the long narrow leaves on peach trees, a genetically and similar related tree; a closeness that has been confused by many amateur gardeners, but the edible fruit parts are entirely and unmistakably different.

The almond tree is appreciated as one of the most beautiful flowering trees known in horticulture. The almond trees begin to flower early in the spring, reliably being loaded with beautiful rosy flowers on the leafless branches of the trees.

The U.S., agricultural, almond tree authorities report that 6000 almond growers cultivate approximately 450,000 acres of almond trees, supplying all of the U.S. domestic market and 70% of the world supply

and are being distributed and sold to 90 nations.

Most nut tasters and food gourmets agree that the pecan is a much more desirable nut in respect to the flavor, cost of production edge, and an available supply over almonds, but the aggressive and cooperative superior marketing promotion of the Almond Nut Association has left the bureaucratic and limp marketing strategies of the Southern Pecan Association far behind. One advantage gained by almond tree promoters is that all European and Mideastern countries grew and used almonds in their food supply for centuries, and pecan promoters have not properly distributed and advertised this American product to massive exposure and those foreign markets to the sampling of the pecan that is necessary to be successful. Pecans also offer tremendous benefits to healthy bodies since their kernels contain extreme concentrations of polyunsaturated fatty acids, that are so high in antioxidants, and they protect the heart by removing clogging cholesterols that interfere with blood flow in veins and arteries. The distinctive flavor and satisfying crunch of almonds make this nut a prime ingredient in candy, pies, cakes, treats for salting, toasting, and dipping in various kinds of icings. Marketable

products of almonds are almond butter; which tastes like and resembles peanut butter; almond extract; an oil extracted from the nuts that is used as a potent flavoring, almond flour; used like flour in cakes and pastries, and almond paste; used in the preparation of confections and candies.

Almonds are used as a health benefit due to the cholesterol free fatty acids that reduce the risks of heart disease. Vitamin E is beneficially concentrated in almonds, which reduces the accumulation of plaque in the arteries, acting as an antioxidant—further reducing inflammation. We suggest growing your own almond trees for enjoyment, entertainment, and health benefits from eating the almonds, as well as the exercise that is spent in growing your own trees.

Patrick A. Malcolm, owner of TyTy Nursery, has an M.S. degree in Botany and has cultivated almond trees for over three decades.

<http://www.tytyga.com>

Historical Controversies Of Nectarine Nomenclature, Prunus Persica Nectarina

By Pat Malcolm

The question of when history on nectarines began cannot be answered properly and with any certainty. Efforts to do this by some websites that suggest that nectarine *Prunus persica nectarina* history should begin in China in 2000 BC to correspond with the history of the peach is absurd for several reasons, unless it is assumed that a nectarine is a cultivar (variety) of a peach. In American agricultural and commercial fruit circles, the nectarine fruit is treated as a separate species from peach, because of the wider possibilities in contrasting a few of the desirable characteristics of each fruit in a marketing campaign to sell more products. Many mischaracterizations of the nectarine development jump up before us to confuse and disorient potential buyers, such as the nectarine profile: promoted as resulting from a cross between a plum and a peach that is patently false. Nectarine fruit also has been described as a fuzzless peach, or as a mutation of a peach that may mutate back to a nectarine and

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then again mutate back to the peach. Even though the word 'nectarine' was first used in England in 1616, there is no conclusive evidence that the usage of the word derived from the Greek word meaning nectar, can be properly applied to the same English fruit that science describes today as the nectarine. It is true that Darwin noticed that a few nectarines might randomly occur on peach trees. He also noted that nectarine grafts from these trees would revert to produce peaches identical to the fruit grown from the original, mother peach tree. The instability of this back and forth process of gaining fuzz and losing fuzz stretches the truthfulness in labeling the nectarine as a genuine mutation. It has been theorized that the nectarine tree has arisen from a simple recessive gene; however, this theory also is wobbly, if one considers present understanding of Mendelian genetic mechanisms.

Luther Burbank in his book, *Fruit Improvement* published in 1921, claimed that the ancient ancestor of the woolly peach developed fuzz in an environment as peculiarly stressful regarding moisture, wind, sunshine, insect, and fungus presence, "the fuzz evolved as a protection against those enemies," and thus, the peach was preserved, but the nectarine fruit with a smoother skin was destroyed as in the example of evolutionary concept of survival of the fittest.

Burbank successfully hybridized a nectarine with an almond in an attempt to create a nectarine type pulp and a pit with the edible desirability quality of almond nuts. The bitter taste of the plum pit was supposedly replaced with the nutty flavor of commercial almonds.

Nectarine fruit can be colored white, yellow, orange, or red and the pulp also exhibits these colorations. Nectarine colors are brighter than those seen in peaches, because the fuzz on the peach tends to dilute the bright color of the skin below. Nectarines when compared to peaches are smaller, rounder, sweet or more acidic, and denser. Nectarines are more susceptible to disease rot and bruising presumably, because the fuzz offers a buffer zone of protection to the peach. Nectarines have a richer flavor and are more aromatic than peaches, because they are grown as freestone cultivars, which show these same contrasting differences from peaches, which are principally grown as clingstone fruits for American markets.

Nectarine trees and nectarine fruit are indistinguishable from peaches in all parts phenotypically, except for the presence of the fuzz. Nectarines could more appropriately be described as a fuzzless cultivar of peaches, *Prunus persica nectarina*. The nectarine fruit is most often eaten with the tender skin on it, and it ripens mostly in June through September. Most of the national production of nectarines comes from California with 95% of the production, but recently orchards of new nectarine

cultivars are being established in Georgia and in South Carolina. The nectarine ripe fruit will keep for up to 5 days in the coldest part of a refrigerator. The nectarine can be judged ripe, when it is fragrant and soft to the touch on the tree.

The nectarine is loaded with health benefits, such as antioxidants, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, beta-carotene, and Potassium.

Patrick A. Malcolm, owner of TyTy Nursery, has an M.S. degree in Biochemistry and has cultivated nectarine trees for over three decades.

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