

Dry Apricots

History:

Long before refrigeration, people were drying fruit to preserve it. Apricots were known to the Ancient Greeks; the Romans learned of the apricot in the first century C.E.; and Arabs were importing the fruit from C.E. 750 (“The Moon of Faith” on NPR). The following is a 1653 recipe for “Dry” Apricots, which would have been more likely used in France or England, although pre-American colonists would have dried cherries, persimmons, cranberries, apples, and even pears; we know that the first Pilgrims brought over pear trees in 1629 at Plymouth because one of the oldest fruit trees on our soil, the Endicott Pear Tree from 1630, still stands there today.



Ingredients:

Fresh apricots
Powdered sugar (optional)

Original 1653 Directions:

Drain them, and turn them into ears, or in round, then bestrew them with sugar in powder, and dry them in a stove.

Leah’s Modifications:

Start with whole, fresh apricots. Use ripe fruit only; green apricots will dry flavorless. The best time to purchase ripe apricots is in late summer, or between July and September. If your apricots are not ripe, you can place them in a paper bag and set it on a sunny windowsill to speed up the ripening process. Wash them, soak them in warm water for 10 minutes, and remove their pits by simply pulling the two halves of the fruit apart and removing the seed, or cutting with a knife along the natural indentation. Your fruit should now be in halves. Turn the fruit inside out, so that the fleshy, soft side is facing up, like a popped disc. If you like your fruit even sweeter than it is, you can sprinkle or pat the fruit with powdered sugar, although apricots are already pretty sweet on their own. Place your apricots on parchment paper on a large baking sheet, fleshy side up, evenly spaced apart. Preheat your oven to 175° F. Do not try to speed up the drying by increasing the heat; you want a low, steady heat that is under 200° F. 130° to 160° F is even better, especially if your slices are thin, but then you increase your wait time for the drying. Wait at least 10 to 12 hours for the apricots to dry. Turn them at the halfway mark to ensure even drying and to curtail curling. They should be slightly soft, pliable, but leathery, and with no juice, when they are finished. Leave the fruit in open containers for a few days to evaporate any remaining moisture (if storing and not eating immediately), and then seal the fruit in glass or plastic containers after 5 days or so. Dried fruit has a shelf life of about 10 months.

Adapted from *The French Cook* by François Pierre, La Varenne, “Englished” by I. D. G., 1653, and modified by Leah Angstman.