



WRITING SAMPLE

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Growing Zones for Apricots

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You covet apricots (*Prunus armeniaca*) for their visual appeal – orange-red, velvety – as well as for their musky, faintly tart taste. It would be fun and convenient to stroll into the garden to pluck a few of the tasty fruits to top a bowl of vanilla ice cream or make a quick pie. But you may wonder if you live in a U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zone that's suitable for growing the beta-carotene-laden fruits.

Recommended Zones

If you live in USDA zones 4 through 9, you're in luck — this is the preferred range for most apricot trees. California grows more than 95 percent of the U.S.'s commercially grown apricots, with Washington state a distant second. Apricot trees can be tricky to grow in cold regions because the trees bloom early and the flowers are often killed by late frosts. If you garden in the north, choose late-blooming varieties and put trees on the north side of a building.

Zonal Varieties

Zone 3 gardeners are not completely out of luck. A few hardy varieties, such as Westcot (*Prunus mandshurica* "Westcot") and Suncot (*Prunus armeniaca mandshurica* "Sungold"), will thrive in that northern climate. In mild-winter areas, choose varieties such as Earligold (*Prunus armeniaca mandshurica* "Sungold") or Royal (*Prunus armeniaca mandshurica* "Royal"), which don't require a really chilly winter to fruit.

Planting Apricot Trees

Planting your apricot tree correctly will give it the best chance of thriving in your zone. Buy bare-root, 1-year-old trees, if possible. Choose a full-sun site with deep, fertile, well-drained soil. Plant new trees in early spring; in mild areas, you can plant in fall if trees are dormant. Create a small mound of soil in the center of your planting hole. Set bare-root

trees atop this mound of soil and carefully spread the roots down and away. Gently back-fill your planting hole and top the planting area with 2 to 3 inches of mulch.

Care

Apricots need water consistently throughout the growing season. Water apricot trees deeply every 10 to 14 days, depending on weather conditions. Apricots normally get the nutrients they need from the soil, but a springtime application of fertilizer is a good measure. Trees that are a year old should have a cup of balanced fertilizer in April. Two-year-old trees need two cups of a high-nitrogen fertilizer, like 21-0-0, again in April. Apricots need pruning, too. Remove weak branches and fruiting wood that is at least 6 years old. To increase the size of the fruit, thin to 3 to 4 fruits per cluster (1 1/2 to 2 inches apart) when fruits are 1 inch in diameter. This also helps prevent uneven year-to-year fruit production.