

The Scoop on this Week's Snack!

THUMBS UP FOR PLUMS...

A member of the rose family, plums are very close cousins to apricots, peaches, apples and pears. Like other brightly coloured fruits, plums pack a big punch of vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, fibre and antioxidants – those wonderful things that keep you healthy and strong. In BC we grow European or Japanese (though they are actually from China) plum trees. European types, like the ones you're snacking on, are either small, round reddish sweet plums or oval shaped purple prune plums. Which type did you get?

Before you bite into your sweet, juicy plum, let's take a closer look...

Hiding within the centre is a flat oval-shaped pit surrounding a seed. That's why a plum is called a stone fruit. Can you think of 3 other stone fruits?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Now we know that a plum has a 'stone' did you also know that it has 'cheeks'? Like us, a fruit has anatomy, or names, for its body parts.

Pit or Stone: The pit supports the fruit as it hangs from the stem. It also provides a route for nutrients to flow from tree to fruit.

Stem End: The end of the fruit that was attached to the tree. There may still be a stem attached to your plum.

Is your Plum firm, with a little 'spring'? If your plum is perfectly ripe the dark blue or red skin should be not too tart and the yellow flesh sweet and soft. At the orchard your plum was left to ripen on the tree before it was picked, then kept cold so that when it gets to you it's just ripe for snacking.

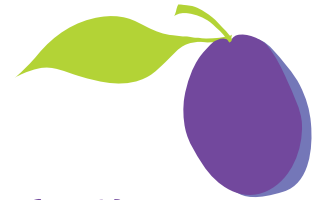
Tip or Blossom End: The opposite end.

Suture: The line, or depression that runs from 'stem' to 'tip'.

Cheeks: The sides of the fruit on either side of the 'suture'.

Shoulders: The bulge around the top of the fruit that becomes rounder as the fruit matures.

Flesh: The edible part beneath the skin.



Go Ahead, Rub it in!

Do you notice a dusty grey coating on your plum? Like most fruits, mature plums develop a coating of plant wax called 'bloom' while still on the tree. This is nature's way of protecting the fruit from dehydration. No need to wash it off, just give it a good rub on your pants or sleeve and watch it shine.



Plum Pickings

The perfect plum you're snacking on got its start on a tree. A farmer, or grower, planted a plum tree then waited for at least 5 years for it to bear fruit. To make it easier to care for his trees and harvest their fruit he planted them together in groups called orchards. Here's what happened next in the orchard...



A Year in the Life of an Orchard

Winter: These are the 'chill hours' when the trees rest. While the tree is dormant, the farmer keeps busy pruning his trees to make them hardier and to increase their fruit yield.

Spring: Warm days awaken the trees and they come to life with a blanket of white blossoms. This is called the **bloom stage** and the bees and other insects must work quickly to pollinate the fragrant blossoms – the bloom stage lasts just over a week. The blossoms fall and the buds form, these are the beginnings of the fruit.

Summer: This is the busiest time for tree and grower. While the fruit is growing, the farmer is busy with irrigation, pest control and light pruning – all to help the fruit grow to maturity. At the peak of summer the first plums are nearly fully coloured and ready for harvesting. Each plum is harvested by hand then taken to a packing facility where it is shipped to local markets. Since the fruit ripens at different times each tree may go through several pickings.

Fall: Things are quieting down in the orchard as only a few late varieties of fruit remain to be harvested. Now the grower spends his time working on autumn tasks such as weeding, cleaning orchards and preparing equipment. Some trees that did not produce a good yield may need to be grafted or replaced.

Let's have some fun with these plum tongue twisters:

The first one, in Japanese, plays with the words *Sumomo* (plum) and *momo* (peach), and *mo* for 'and' and 'also'. (English: "Plum and peach are both in the peach family")

Sumomo mo momo mo momo no uchi

Now for an easy one – until you say it three times fast!

Please prune plum trees promptly

1 mature plum tree = 30 lbs of plums
20 to 30 years = life expectancy of a productive plum tree



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