**Plums/Prunes**

1. **What is a Plum?**
2. They are considered a “stone fruit” because they have a very hard and large seed.
3. They are related to nectarines, peaches, apricots, and cherries.
4. There are over 2000 different varieties. Over 100 are available in the United States.
5. Most of the plums we see today originated from the European and Japanese varieties.
6. The plum tree grows 5 to 7 meters (about 16 to 23 feet) and has greenish-white flowers.
7. The plum is medium-sized, about 1 to 3 inches in diameter, with a firm, juicy, and mealy flesh.
8. The fruit’s peel is smooth with a natural dusty-white coating called a wax-bloom. The peel/skin can be red, purple, blue-black, red, green, yellow, or amber.
9. The fruit’s flesh can be yellow, green, pink, and orange.
	1. It seems between the skin and flesh, you really can get a taste of the rainbow…without skittles.
10. Dried plum fruits are known as prunes.
11. **History of Plums**
12. There is such a large number of plums available that it is hard to determine where the plum originated from. According to the earliest writings, plums are at least 2000 years old.
13. Historians really are unsure about a lot of the history of plums, but many think that European plums made their way across the Atlantic with the pilgrims in the 17th century.
14. The pilgrims discovered wild plums growing along the eastern coast of the United States upon arriving.
15. The European plum crop replaced the native wild plum.
16. Japanese plums actually originated in China and were introduced in Japan only 300 years ago. The Japanese plum was introduced to the United States in 1870.
17. Some of the top producers today are China, the United States, and Romania.
18. The process of drying plums into prunes is thought to have developed in Europe.
19. The European plum is ideal to make dried plums because it is smaller, denser, and less juicy than Japanese varieties.
20. In the 19th century the process of drying plums began in California, which is now the leading producer of prunes worldwide.
21. **Nutrition & Health Benefits**
22. Plums are good sources of vitamin C, vitamin K, potassium, and dietary fiber.
23. Vitamin C is essential for the formation, growth, maintenance, and repair of all bodily tissues, including skin, blood vessels, bones, and teeth.
24. Vitamin K is vital to the function of several proteins involved in blood coagulation.
25. Potassium is needed to build proteins, break down and use carbohydrates, build muscle, maintain normal body growth, control the electrical activity of the heart, and control the acid-base balance in the body.
26. Plums and prunes, like most fruits, contain a good source of fiber to help your digestive system work at its best.
27. Plums rank among the top ten fresh fruits with the most antioxidant potential. Blueberries, raspberries, cranberries, strawberries, and blackberries rank higher, while avocadoes, oranges, cherries, and grapes have less than plums.
28. Antioxidants help neutralize harmful substances normally found in the body. Left unchecked, these harmful substances damage cells, which can lead to a number of health conditions and chronic illnesses.
29. Most of the vitamin C in prunes, the dried plums, is destroyed during the drying process.
30. One cup of fresh plums has about 70 to 80 calories, whereas one cup of prunes provides about 418 calories. Most people should limit a single serving of prunes to about ¼ cup.
31. **Other important nutrition/health information**

A. Recently, there was a study published in the British Journal of Nutrition that found that eating prunes, dried plums, can help prevent fractures and osteoporosis. Researchers think the connection is from dried plums ability to suppress the rate of bone resorption, or the breakdown of bone, which tends to exceed the rate of new bone growth as people age.

1. Researchers believe this could be the case because of the phenolic compounds (antioxidants) and good sources of nutrients that affect bone health in prunes (vitamin K, boron, and potassium)

2. So eat your dairy and prunes for good bone health!

B. Plums, prunes and prune juice naturally contain sorbitol.

1. Sorbitol is an unfermentable sugar that has been shown to provide a laxative effect. Be careful with incorporating large amounts of prunes or prune juice into your diet.

3. Remember to add them gradually to help your body get used to the new food.

1. **Selection & Storage**
2. The plum season extends from May through October.
3. Look for plums that feature a rich color and that may still have a slight whitish bloom showing they have not been overhandled. They should also yield to gentle pressure if they are ripe and ready to eat.
4. You can purchase plums that are firm and ripen them at home, but avoid those that are excessively hard as they will be immature and will probably not develop a good taste and texture profile.
5. They should be free from punctures and bruises.
6. Plums that are not yet ripe can be left at room temperature. Plums mature quickly, so check them in a day or two to make sure they are not becoming overripe.
7. Once they are ripe, plums can be stored in the refrigerator for a few days.
8. Plums can be frozen, but to ensure maximum taste remove their stone pits before placing in the freezer.
9. For the most antioxidants, consume plums when they are fully ripened.
10. Prunes should be stored in an air tight container in a cool, dark, dry place where they will keep for several months. If you store them in the refrigerator, they should last for up to 6 months.
11. **Preparation & Use**
12. Plums are delicious eaten fresh. If they have been in the refrigerator, allow them to approach room temperature before eating them as this will help them to have maximum juiciness and sweetness.
13. Plums can be used in cooking as well. If you want to remove the pit before eating or cooking, cut the plum in half lengthwise, and gently twist the halves in opposite directions.
14. If you want to remove the skin, blanch the plums in boiling water for 30 seconds. Once you remove the fruit from the water, quickly run them under cold water before peeling to stop the blanching process and allow for easier handling.
15. Plums and prunes can be added to just about anything: yogurt, cold cereal, oatmeal, salads, sandwiches, pizzas, breads, cookies, trail mix, etc.
16. You can also make plums into sauce, jam, or juice.
17. **Fun Facts**
18. Plums grow on every continent except Antarctica.
19. Prunes used to be dried on the tree and in the sun like raisins, but now they are dried in forced air tunnels heated by gas to give a more uniform product.
20. It takes 4 pounds of ripe plums to make one pound of prunes.
21. It takes 3 to 4 years after planting a plum tree to begin to produce quality fruit.
22. The plum is mentioned in the nursery rhyme Little Jack Horner.
23. **Activities**

Taste test fresh plum slices vs dried plums.

Taste test dried plums vs. other dried fruit.

Make a plum smoothie (2 plums pitted, 5 strawberries, ½ cup plain or fruit yogurt). Add all ingredients and add to a blender.

Make spiced plums with yogurt (8 ripe plums, 1 tsp pumpkin pie spice/cinnamon, 2 Tbsp honey, 1 ½ cups plain yogurt). Use a small knife to cut all the way around one plum. Hold the plum in your hands and twist until you can pull the two halves apart, then use a tsp to scoop out the pit. Carefully slice the plum into quarters and place in a bowl, then repeat with the rest. Sprinkle pumpkin pie spice or cinnamon over the plums and drizzle over the honey. Divide the plums between 6 bowls and serve each one with a large spoonful of yogurt on the side.