



Produce Profile: **STONE FRUIT**



Sweet STONE FRUIT

JUICY GEMS FROM OGC

WHEN IS PEAK STONE FRUIT SEASON?

From grower partners in California, organic stone fruit season typically begins in late April or early May with apricots and red cherries to start. Mid-May brings the first harvests of yellow nectarines and peaches, followed soon by white varieties. By early June, these juicy gems are joined by plums and pluots. The number of California grown stone fruit varieties available in July is staggering, with harvests shifting north in late August as the Northwest season starts up with delicious offerings. Stone fruit season in both regions wraps up in early October.

WHO DOES OGC SOURCE FROM?

OGC partners with small to medium-sized growers and larger grower collectives that prioritize flavor and quality, just like us. Years of experience show that when stone fruit is held on the tree for the longest amount of time possible, the eating experience is better. Our like-minded growers have expertise in variety selection, growing, harvesting and packing to produce the most phenomenal fruit.

WHICH VARIETIES OF STONE FRUIT DOES OGC CARRY?

In addition to red and Rainier cherries, apricots, yellow and white nectarines and peaches, donut peaches and more, we are proud to offer over 50 varieties of plums and pluots. For detailed plum and pluot descriptions and availability ranges, don't miss the Primer included in the Stone Fruit Toolkit.

WHAT IS A PLUOT ANYWAY?

This apricot and plum hybrid was developed by Floyd Zaiger of Zaiger Genetics in the late 20th century using traditional breeding methods. This hybridization technique meets organic standards that stipulate all certified organic varieties are non-GMO. Early varieties are genetically composed of 25% apricot and 75% plum parentage. But some contemporary varieties are known to be heavier on apricot parentage. Drawing skin traits from plums, including color, texture and tartness, and flesh traits from apricots, notably sweetness, pluots are valued for their incredible eating qualities. Pluot skin can range from yellow, green, red, purple or black and may be solid, mottled or even striped. Flesh color ranges from white, green, yellow, orange or red.

Other hybrids include aprium (which are often sold as apricots) and plumcot, both of which represent a small fraction of what's grown organically at commercial volume.

WHAT IS A FREESTONE VARIETY?

This term refers to whether the flesh of the fruit clings to its stone (or pit) and is most often associated with peaches - but also true of nectarines, plums and pluots. Freestone varieties are ideal for culinary applications as the stone is easily removed with little to no flesh (or elbow grease) wasted.

WHAT IS “THE KILLING ZONE”?

The killing zone refers to the temperature range of 38-50 degrees Fahrenheit which is known to turn fruit mealy and cause other undesirable damage. This temperature range should be avoided at every stage, from harvest and shipping to storage and display. Stone fruit thrive in consistency, so avoid temperature swings too.

HOW MUCH INVENTORY SHOULD RETAILERS PLAN TO HAVE ON-HAND?

Stone fruit ripens quickly and requires a little extra care. Unlike apples or citrus that can stand to be kept in backstock and piled high in displays, stone fruit inventory management can be a bit of a dance. Pay close attention during the season to the volume you’re bringing in versus how much is ending up in shoppers’ carts, and how long the fruit is sitting in storage and in displays. Find your rhythm and order so that a steady stream of fruit is being received and leaving the store all season long.

HOW SHOULD SHOPPERS STORE STONE FRUIT AT HOME?

Stone fruit is best stored at room temperature out of direct sunlight until it’s ripe and ready to eat. Storing it in the refrigerator will suspend ripening and result in a less than ideal eating experience. Once fully ripe, a piece of stone fruit can be placed in the refrigerator to extend its shelf life, but not for too long.

WHEN IS STONE FRUIT RIPE AND READY TO EAT?

Peak ripeness differs from variety to variety, as the flesh of some plums and pluots will never become as soft as that of an apricot, nectarine or peach. A good sign that a piece of stone fruit is ripe and ready to eat is its aroma. If the fruit emits a sweet and pleasant smell, it’s likely ready. A gentle thumb pressed into the shoulder of the fruit at the stem end can indicate ripeness too, a little give letting shoppers know it’s ready.

“Ready” can be up to personal preference. There’s a case to be made for eating a piece of stone fruit at each stage of its journey to fully ripe. For example, the bright tartness and toothsome texture of a nectarine that’s just slightly underripe can produce an incredible pickle. Fans of grilled peaches may find that completely ripe fruit doesn’t hold up as well to extreme heat. If your staff or shoppers are particularly interested in exploring food, experimenting with stone fruit at each stage of ripening can be an exciting way to deepen appreciation for this category.

HOW DO THE FLAVOR PROFILES OF WHITE AND YELLOW NECTARINES AND PEACHES DIFFER?

White peaches and nectarines are lower in acid, creating a sugar-forward flavor and floral aroma. Yellow peaches and nectarines are just as sweet but have more acid, making a dynamic and classic flavor profile.

SHOULD PLUOTS BE EATEN WHILE FIRM OR SOFT?

Most varieties of pluots are at peak ripeness when their flesh is a bit firmer than a peach or nectarine. These often crisp and crunchy varieties burst with flavor and juice despite giving less when a thumb is pressed into its shoulder. Give a pluot a good sniff. If it’s aromatic, and doesn’t seem overly firm, it’s ready to enjoy.



SHARE THIS INFO WITH EATERS

- Domestically grown organic stone fruit is available from April into October from California and the Northwest. During the Northern hemisphere winter, import organic stone fruit from the Southern hemisphere may be available.
- Stone fruit ripens best on the countertop out of direct sunlight.
- To check for ripeness, smell a piece of stone fruit and gently press a thumb into the shoulder at the stem end. If it's aromatic and gives slightly, it's ripe and ready to eat.
- A pluot is a hybrid of plum and apricot.
- Pluots and plums often have firmer flesh than apricots, nectarines and peaches. Many varieties are at their most delicious when still crisp.
- Refrigeration stops stone fruit from ripening. Wait until the fruit is fully ripe to refrigerate to “hold” the fruit a little longer.
- Freestone means the fruit doesn't cling to the pit making preparation easier for recipes. Nectarines, peaches, pluots and plums are either clingstone or freestone, and shoppers can seek out the best option for fresh eating or cooking.
- With so many varieties of stone fruit to choose from, let your eyes and taste buds explore to find your favorites.

MERCHANDISING TIPS

- Use familiar favorites like peaches and nectarines as a base to build around, including both white and yellow options when available. From there, bring in specialty varieties to entice new fans.
- There's something new nearly every week during stone fruit season. Look for opportunities to include new varieties as they come in and keep displays front and center.
- Stone fruit offers a fantastic opportunity for color breaks. Keep your sets lively with plenty of red, yellow, purple and black varieties. Place mottled or striped varieties in between to add visual appeal.
- Go big on stone fruit demos and provide samples. Even passive sampling can gain new stone fruit fans and sales.
- Include cut examples in displays. Being able to see all the dramatic color combinations of skin and flesh will excite and delight.
- Don't forget the POP! Educate and guide shoppers through the differences between each variety.
- Cross-merchandise with other inspiring items. Tomatoes, melons, fresh herbs and even cheese or cured meats can inspire shoppers to pick stone fruit for more than just fresh eating.