



By Peggy Crum, MA, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

Dates are not your typical dried fruit. These little jewels of the desert ripen on the tree and, because of hot and arid conditions, are often sun-dried in place. Then they are harvested, cleaned, sorted, and packaged fresh from the palm trees they grow on.

Why does that matter? Well, because dates are not fully dehydrated, they don't have an extended shelf life like raisins, dried apricots, and prunes despite being found alongside them in the grocery store. Store at room temperature, dates keep for just 6 weeks, in the fridge for 6 months, in the freezer for a year.

Prior to the early 20th century, dates were pretty much unknown to Americans. Beginning around 1900, Southern California's Coachella Valley became home to groves of date palms, now expanded to include strips of desert in Arizona and Mexico. Deglet noor and medjool continue to be the two main production varieties for US growers.

Of all 3,000 varieties of dates, medjool dates are the largest measuring over 2 inches in length. They are plump, moist, and meaty with tender skins. Flavorful, too, with hints of wild honey, caramel, and cinnamon. Their skin has a slight shimmer because of the natural sugar crystals which sometimes migrate to the outside of the date giving them a white, powdery coating.

Dates are stone-fruits, easily pitted by cutting a slit along the side and popping out the pit. For use in baking, it works well to snip dates into pieces with kitchen shears.

Direct from the package, dates make a sweet snack and a delightful addition to an appetizer platter with nuts and cheese. Savory uses include steaming with couscous or rice, or cooking in a tagine with lamb or chicken as in traditional North African cuisine. Medjool dates, once pitted, have a nice size cavity for stuffing with nuts, cheese, or both as in our featured recipe.

RECIPE for health

NOVEMBER 2017

featured food:

MEDJOOL DATES

Bacon-wrapped Dates Stuffed with Goat Cheese

By Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski, Residential Dining Services
Makes 12

- 24 medjool dates
- 24 walnut halves, roasted
- 1/2 c goat cheese
- 12 slices of bacon, halved

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Pit the dates: slit each date along one long side, open it like a book, and remove the pit.

Tuck one walnut half and a teaspoon or so of goat cheese into each date, close it, and pinch lightly to seal the date closed. Wrap one-half strip of bacon around each date and secure with a toothpick. Place on a baking tray.

Bake in pre-heated oven for 10 to 20 minutes, or until bacon is slightly browned. Move to paper towel to drain, then to a serving platter. Serve warm.

- Join us in person at Brody Square Demo Kitchen.
Sign-up at health4u@msu.edu.