283. *PRUNUS ARMENIACA* L. (ROSACEAE) — Apricot, Chinese Almond, Apple

Apricots are cultivated for the fruit, eaten fresh out of hand, or dried, made into conserves or alcoholic beverages. Kernels produce a sweet edible oil sometimes used as substitute for almond oil. Chinese almonds are the seed kernels of several sweet varieties of apricot, used for almond cookies, eaten salted and blanched, or made into gruel or flour. Afghans also use the seeds as almonds. Bitter apricot kernel is highly toxic because of prussic acid present. Expressed oil, known as persic oil or apricot oil, is used as a pharmaceutical vehicle; it is obtained by the same process as bitter almond oil. Pit shells have been used to prepare activated charcoal, via destructive distillation.[38]

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. In Biblical days, Solomon said "comfort me with apples for I am sick."[38] Surely they didn't mean apricot pits in the Garden of Eden. As Milton[276] says, "The fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe." The pits do contain laetrile-like compounds which can cure or kill, depending on dosage. Considered antidotal, antitussive, aphrodisiac, cyanogenetic, demulcent, emollient, expectorant, preventitive, sedative, tonic, vermifuge, vulnerary, the apricot is an element in folk medicines for anemia, asthma, bronchitis, catarrh, cold, constipation, cough, eyes, fertility (female), fever, heart, hemorrhage, inflammation, laryngitis, puerperium, rheumatism, spasm, swellings, thirst, and tumors. The fruit is said to be a folk remedy for cancer. Medicinally, a paste, obtained by crushing the kernel, is used for inflammation of the eyes and is considered antispasmodic, demulcent, pectoral, sedative, vulnerary, and anthelmintic. Ginger and licorice combined with kernels make a confection used as a tussic and expectorant remedy. Another concoction made by fermentation is used as a prophylactic and tonic. Decoction of kernels made into a beverage is used for cough, asthma, and catarrhal ailments. Kernel juice is used for hemorrhages. In Chinese medicine, fruit of bitter almond is useful in heart disease.[38] In Korea, the expectorant kernel is used to treat dry throat.

Laetrile, according to some laetrile advocates, is broken down by the enzyme, beta-glucosidase, to release toxic cyanide. The enzyme is believed to be prevalent in tumor tissue but scarce elsewhere. Triggered by laetrile advocates, the FDA banned laetrile from interstate commerce in 1971. In a 1980 clinical study by the NCI, it was concluded that laetrile and natural products containing it, such as apricot pits, were "ineffective as a treatment for cancer."[37] Per 100 g, the fruit is reported to contain 38 to 58 calories, 83.4 to 85.6 g H_2O, 0.5 to 1.2 g protein, 0.4 to 0.6 g fat, 9.0 to 14.1 g total carbohydrate, 1.1 to 1.5 g fiber, 0.6 to 1.2 g ash, 13 to 30 mg Ca, 24 to 34 mg P, 0.7 to 1.1 mg Fe, 1 mg Na, 218 mg K, 1340 to 3145 μg β-carotene equivalent, 0.02 to 0.04 mg thiamine, 0.05 to 0.06 mg riboflavin, 0.4 to 0.7 mg niacin, and 6 to 10 mg ascorbic acid. Fruits also contain lycopine, quercetin, rutin, isoquercitrin, benzyl alcohol, epoxydihydrolinalool, linalool, isobutyric acid, capronic acid, and lactone.[33] WOI reports xylose, glucose, fructose, sucrose, sorbitol, meso-inositol, etc. among the sugars and polyols. The fruits also contain pectic substances (1% as calcium pectate). Malic and citric are said to be the principal acids, with tartaric, quinic, and succinic also reported. The volatile essence contains myrcene, limonene, *p*-cymene, terpinoleine, *trans*-2-hexenol, α-terpeneol, geranial, geraniol, 2-methylbutyric acid, acetic acid, linalool, etc.[1] The edible portion (93% of fruit) of dried Indian apricots contains, per 100 g: 19.4% H_2O, 1.6 g protein, 0.7 g ether extract, 2.1 g fiber, 73.4 g other carbohydrates, 2.89 ash, 110 mg Ca, 70 mg P, 4.6 mg Fe, 98 IU vitamin A, 0.22 mg thiamine, 2.3 mg nicotinic acid, 2 mg ascorbic acid, and 306 calories.[1] The cake left after oil extraction from the seed contains too much amygdalin, yielding 0.06% HCN. Used as a fertilizer, it contains 6.64% N, 2.2% P_2O_5 and 1.14% K_2O. The seed contains, per 100 g, 549 calories, 8% water, 29% protein, 47.3% fat, 12.9% total carbohydrate, 3.0 g fiber, 2.8 g ash, 140 mg Ca, 276 mg P, 4.4 mg Fe, 716 mg K, 0 mg β-carotene equivalent, 0.14 mg thiamine, 0.49 mg riboflavin,