

California's Almond Orchards

The California almond industry is attracting the interest of beekeepers all over the country. The almond orchard's demands for honey bees is so strong that many beekeepers in Florida have actually defaulted on their contracts with local watermelon producers to bring their bees to the west coast where they lease their hives and bees to the almond growers.

Almonds were first found growing a long way from California's sunny landscape. The first almonds were found in China and central Asia. Franciscan Padres first brought almonds to California in the middle of the 1700's, before the American revolution. Sadly Padres efforts were unsuccessful. It wasn't until the early 1900's that almond lovers discovered that California's Central Valley had perfect growing conditions for genetically improved almond orchards. Nearly a half million Californian acres are devoted to growing almonds. It is estimated that there are six thousand almond growers in the state.

Today, California is the only place in North America where almonds are successfully grown for commercial use. The reason that California is so successful for almond producers is the climate. Almond trees love hot summers and cool winters. Almonds don't like sub-zero temperatures. Because almond trees are not self-pollinating they require the use of bees in order to produce almonds. Every February, when the almond trees are in bloom, beekeepers set up hives in the orchard so that the growers can enjoy a lucrative harvest. The inability to self-pollinate force almond producers to plant multiple variety's of almond trees.

Almonds are harvested when the split in the shell widens enough for the nut to dry. This typically happens between the middle of August and early October. When the hull is completely open its time for the almond harvest to begin.

When its time to harvest the almond crops, orchard owners have the orchards swept so that they are completely free of debris. Once the orchards are debris free, the mechanical tree shakers are brought in . The mechanical tree shakers gently shake the trees. The almonds fall from the trees. The almonds are left on the ground to finish drying. When the almonds are dry they are swept into rows where they are gathered by a machine and deposited in the huller.

Nutritionally almonds have a lot going for them. There are only seven grams of fat in one ounce (a single serving of almonds is one ounce). Almonds do not have sodium and cholesterol free. Almonds are an excellent way to get magnesium and vitamin E. Almonds are also a source of Riboflavin, Phosphorus and copper.

Seventy-five percent of California's almond crop is exported.

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