**Apricot Oatmeal Bars**

Makes 9 large bars, or 18 small bars

12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, **melted**

2 teaspoons soft butter for greasing pan

1 cup firmly packed dried apricots, cut into quarters

1 1/2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats

1 cup all-purpose flour

¼ tsp. baking soda

1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Preheat an oven to 350°F. Grease and line the bottom and sides of a 9-inch square baking pan with parchment paper. (some paper hanging over the edges is fine). Lightly grease the paper as well.

In a bowl, combine the rolled oats, flour, brown sugar, salt, baking soda and cinnamon. Stir with a wooden spoon until well blended and no lumps of sugar remain.

Add the snipped apricots, melted butter and vanilla to the bowl. Stir until well blended. The dough will be moist and crumbly. Dump the dough into the prepared baking pan. Press the dough into the pan with your fingers.

Bake until the top is golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes. Using oven mitts, remove the pan from the oven, set on a wire cooling rack and let cool completely.

Lift the paper and the oatmeal bars from the pan and place on a work surface. Peel away the paper from the sides and bottom. Using a small, sharp knife, cut into squares.

Store in an airtight container.