

Pecans—Keep Them Fresh Year Round

HE-0485

Pecans are one of the top three tree nuts commercially produced in this country. The other two are almonds and walnuts. Pecans rank third in the nation and first in Alabama as a commercial nut crop. They are the leading income producer in fruit and nut tree crops for Alabama producers.

Types & Varieties

Two types of pecans are grown in Alabama—native (seedling) and papershell. It takes about 2½ pounds of native pecans in the shell to get 1 pound or 4 cups of nutmeat. Only 2 pounds of papershell give about 1 pound of nutmeat. Stuart is the No. 1 pecan variety in the state. Other popular varieties include Schley, Success, and Desirable.

Food Value

Most nuts are rich in fat. The pecan contains over 70 percent fat. It is a good source of calcium, phosphorous, iron, and vitamins A and B. Pecans make a useful contribution to the protein in the diet, but it is better to consider them as a source of fat and use them interchangeably with other fatty foods, such as butter and oils. Pecans also contain a small amount of carbohydrates. They are good as an energy food. One cup of nutmeat contains about 740 calories.

Selection

Allow nuts to mature fully on the tree. And do not let them lie on wet ground. The best nuts are neither the first nor the last to mature, but those that ripen in mid-season.

Select only plump, well-filled nuts. Any pecan variety can be successfully stored if it is a good quality nut.

Nutmeat should be plump and fairly uniform in color and size. Limp, rubbery, dark, or shriveled kernels may be stale. Separate the nuts into unbroken halves and broken pieces. Unbroken halves have at least twice the shelf life of broken pieces.

Shelling

Unshelled pecans resist insects, molding, and rancidity much longer than shelled nuts. But shelling before storage reduces the weight and the storage space needed by about one-half. Shelled nuts are also ready for use.

To shell pecans as unbroken halves, dampen or condition them before cracking. Cover the nuts with lukewarm water. Let thin-shelled nuts stand in this water 1½ hours and thick-shelled nuts, 3 hours. Remove nuts from the water, drain and let them stand overnight or at least 8 hours. Then shell the pecans within 24 hours after they are conditioned.

Crack the nuts by applying pressure end to end by one of the following methods:

1. Inertia-type nutcracker.
2. Hand-operated, piston-type cracker that is adjustable for different sizes.
3. Power equipment in a pecan-shelling plant.

After cracking, remove the pecan halves from the shells with a nut picker, paring knife, toothpick, or some other pointed tool.

To prevent molding, nutmeat which was dampened before shelling must be dried immediately after shelling. This may be done in one of the following ways:

1. Spread them in a single layer on a clean tray and place them in a dry, well-ventilated room for 2 days.
2. Spread them in a single layer in front of an electric fan.
3. Spread them in a single layer on a clean screen in the sun for 1 day.

During the drying process, keep the nuts from becoming contaminated. Use clean, shallow containers and cover the nuts with a clean, thin cloth. Select a place with no flies, ants, moths, rodents, or birds.

Storage

It is now possible to store pecans in the home for year round use. They will be good raw or toasted in desserts, salads, candies, and baked goods. To keep them at their best, protect pecans from air, moisture, and high temperatures. They may be stored in any one of three ways:

1. Unshelled in a cool place for approximately 6 months.
2. Shelled in the refrigerator for approximately 9 months.
3. Shelled in the freezer at 0°F. for up to 2 years.

The important thing to remember is to store the nuts before they become rancid. Pecans become rancid after several months of storage unless they are properly canned or frozen.

Nuts in the shell keep their high quality longer than shelled nuts. Whole nuts become rancid less quickly than nuts in pieces. Unroasted nuts keep better than roasted ones.

Containers: Those suitable for storing pecan nutmeat are as follows:

- glass freezer jars
- plastic cartons
- reusable tin cans
- odorless, grease-proof, moisture-vapor-resistant plastic bags

Freezer Storage: Package the nuts in suitable containers, remove all air possible, and close tightly. Label each package with the name and date. Add whether they are unbroken halves or broken pieces. Store in the freezer at 0°F. or below. Use within 18 to 24 months. Allow nuts to thaw before use.

Refrigerator Storage: Place shelled pecans in suitable

containers and store in the refrigerator not longer than 9 months.

Unshelled Pecans: Store unshelled pecans in a cool place (32° to 38°F.). They will keep fresh for about 6 months.

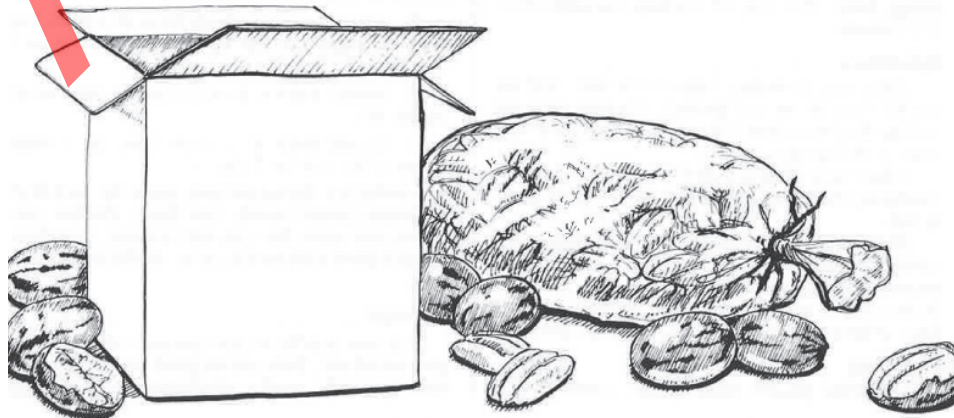
Canning: Package dry nutmeat in clean, thoroughly dry standard canning jars. Leave 1 inch headspace. Adjust lids according to manufacturer's recommendations and process in a boiling water bath canner for 30 minutes. Store in a cool, dark, dry place. Use within 6 months.

NOTE: Canned pecans may not be of the best quality because of the fat. Whenever fat is heated, it will become rancid if the product is not used soon.

Using Pecans

It takes only a little imagination to make company fare of plain food. Special recipes are not always needed. Many of your favorite foods are more delicious when you add nuts. Start with these suggestions:

- Serve sour cream with nuts on meat or baked potatoes.
- For waffles, biscuits, or muffins, stir nuts into blended dry ingredients before adding liquid.
- Add nuts to meat, poultry, or seafood salads.
- Try slivered or sliced nuts in tossed vegetable salads.
- Roll ice cream balls in chopped nuts. Freeze balls separately until set.
- Use toasted, chopped nuts as a quick topping for cream pie or ice cream pie.
- Sprinkle cupcakes with nuts before baking and skip the frosting.
- Perk up your next vegetable souffle with finely chopped nuts added along with the vegetable.



Recipes

Pecan Pie

3 eggs
½ cup sugar
1 cup light or dark corn syrup
⅛ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla
¼ cup melted butter or margarine
1 cup pecans, halved or chopped
1 unbaked pie crust

Beat eggs. Mix in the sugar and syrup; then the salt and vanilla. Add the melted butter or margarine. Place pecans in the bottom of an unbaked pie crust. Add the filling and bake at 350°F. for 50 to 60 minutes. The nuts will rise to the top and form a crusted layer.

Sand Tarts

1 cup butter or margarine
½ cup confectioners' sugar
2 cups sifted flour
2 teaspoons vanilla
1½ cups chopped pecans
Confectioners' sugar for coating

Beat the butter until it is smooth and fluffy. Gradually add sugar, beating well after each addition. Continue beating until light and fluffy. Gradually add flour to the creamed mixture, mixing well after each addition. Add vanilla and nuts and stir. Form dough into small balls. Place on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake at 350°F. for 20 minutes. Cool slightly and roll in confectioners' sugar or extra-fine granulated sugar. Cool and pack in an airtight container.

Pecan Stuffing

¼ cup butter or margarine
¼ cup onion, finely chopped
¼ cup celery (stalks and leaves), chopped
¼ cup mushrooms, chopped
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon thyme
¼ teaspoon poultry seasoning
Dash cayenne pepper
Dash garlic salt
2 cups bread cubes or coarse, soft crumbs
½ cup chicken or beef bouillon or meat broth
¾ cup pecans, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 325°F. Grease a 1-quart baking dish. Melt butter or margarine in a heavy pan. Add onion, celery, mushrooms, and seasonings. Cook a few minutes until celery is tender but still crisp, stirring

occasionally. Add bread, bouillon or broth, and nuts. Mix lightly but well. Put stuffing into baking dish. Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until lightly browned.

NOTE: Stuffing may be used to stuff a chicken or breast of veal or lamb.

Party Nut Bread

⅓ cup light brown sugar, packed
¼ cup shortening
2 eggs
2 cups flour, unsifted
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup milk
¾ cup candied fruit, chopped
1 teaspoon lemon rind, grated
½ cup pecans, chopped

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9- x 5- x 3-inch loaf pan. Beat sugar, shortening, and eggs until creamy. Mix dry ingredients thoroughly. Stir dry ingredients and milk alternately into egg mixture. Add fruit, lemon rind, and nuts to last portion of flour mixture and then stir into the batter. Pour into baking pan. Bake about 1 hour or until toothpick inserted in center of loaf comes out clean. Cool on rack 10 minutes before removing from pan. Finish cooling on rack.

Sugar and Spice Nuts

1 tablespoon butter or margarine, melted
1 egg white, slightly beaten
2 cups pecans
1 cup sugar
½ teaspoon salt
1½ teaspoons cinnamon
¾ teaspoon nutmeg
¾ teaspoon allspice

Preheat oven to 300°F. Slowly stir melted butter or margarine into beaten egg white. Stir in pecans. Mix sugar and spices. Spread about one-fourth of the sugar mixture in a 10- x 15-inch shallow baking pan. Coat a few pecans at a time in remaining sugar mixture and arrange in the pan. Sprinkle the rest of the sugar mixture over the nuts. Bake 15 to 20 minutes or until pecans have lightly browned. Remove pecans from oven and stir gently to separate nuts. Cool. Store in a tightly closed container.

NOTE: You can also use unroasted almonds and English walnuts with pecans.

Pecan Buttermilk Pralines

2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon soda
1 cup buttermilk
2 teaspoons vanilla
2 cups pecan halves

Mix sugar, soda, and buttermilk in a heavy saucepan and cook over medium heat to the softball stage (234°F. on candy thermometer). Remove from heat and add vanilla and pecans. Begin beating immediately. Beat until candy begins to thicken. Drop by teaspoon on waxed paper or greased baking sheet. Cool. Makes 30 small patties.

NOTE: If mixture becomes too thick before all is dropped, stir in 1 or 2 drops of warm water.

Pecan Clusters

¼ cup butter or margarine
½ cup sugar
1 egg
1½ teaspoons vanilla
1½ 1-ounce squares unsweetened chocolate, melted
½ cup sifted flour
¼ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups broken pecans

Cream butter or margarine and sugar. Add egg, vanilla, and melted chocolate and mix well. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt and stir into creamed mixture. Add pecans. Drop from teaspoon on greased baking sheet. Bake at 350°F. for 10 minutes.

Pecan Cheese Roll

1 pound processed American Cheese
4 cloves garlic
1½ cups pecans
3 tablespoons chili powder

Put cheese, garlic, and pecans through a food chopper

using a fine blade. Mix well. Shape into a roll about 1½ inches in diameter. Sprinkle chili powder over waxed paper. Roll cheese log in chili powder until well-coated. Wrap in waxed paper, plastic wrap, or aluminum foil and chill several hours or overnight. Slice to serve. It will keep in the refrigerator several weeks.

Salted Pecans

Melt 2 tablespoons of butter, margarine, or salad oil in a heavy skillet over low heat. Add 1 cup of shelled pecan halves and stir until hot. Avoid overcooking because pecans darken after being removed from the fat. Drain on absorbent paper. Sprinkle lightly with salt while still warm.

Sugared Pecans

1 cup sugar
¼ cup water
1 teaspoon light corn syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla
1½ cups pecan halves

Boil sugar, water, and syrup together until the long thread stage is reached (230° to 234°F. on candy thermometer). Add vanilla; cool until lukewarm. Beat until the mixture becomes creamy. Add pecan halves. Stir until pecans are well coated. Pour on waxed paper and separate pecans. Store in a tightly covered container.

NOTE: If mixture becomes too firm before all pecans are coated, add a few drops of warm water and continue stirring.

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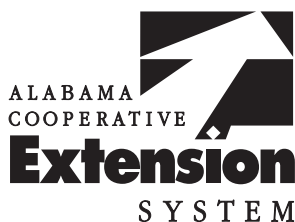
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