

Munch the crunch

A nut is actually the dried fruit of a tree. To get really technical, peanuts are legumes, not nuts, and are relatives of beans and peas.

In many places, peanuts are called "ground nuts" because they grow underground, while true nuts come from trees. Brazil nuts and cashews are really seeds from inside fruit. Confused? No matter what you call them, they are important.

Nuts contribute rich flavor and crunch to many kinds of foods and are great nibbles on their own.

Nuts are a source of incomplete protein but, added to dishes containing grains or dairy foods, they become a good source of complete protein. Nuts are a good source of vitamin B-6 and some minerals, but they also can be very high in fat.

USE ONLY fresh nuts in baking. To check for freshness, sniff. Any odor indicates rancidity. The high fat content causes rancidity. This means they have been improperly stored.

All varieties of nuts taste better if the skin is removed and they are toasted in the oven before adding to a recipe.

To toast shelled nuts, place them on an ungreased cookie sheet and toast in a 350-degree oven from three to 10 minutes depending on the size. Watch carefully, and turn frequently to avoid scorching.

Toasting also can be done in a heavy pan on top of the stove. Use a little oil in the heavy pan, add nuts, heat slowly 10-15 minutes until lightly browned, stirring frequently.

TO MAINTAIN best eating quality, nuts need protection. A nut will keep longer if kept close to its original form.

Nuts in the shell retain higher quality than those shelled, and nuts left in their skins keep better than



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skinned. Nuts that are whole last longer than those chopped, unroasted nuts keep better than roasted; and unsalted keep longer than salted.

Nuts in the shell keep well in a nut bowl at room temperature for a short period of time. Avoid storing nuts in a damp place.

Shelled nuts will keep fresh for several months stored in tightly closed containers in the refrigerator or freezer. When frozen, nuts will keep for a year or longer, depending on the type of nut.

Pecans may be limp when thawed. Crisp them by baking in a 350-degree oven for 10-15 minutes for whole nuts, less for chopped.

CRACKING NUTS can be a real challenge. Brazil nuts crack best if frozen for at least 24 hours.

Another way is to cover them with cold water, boil for three minutes, drain, cover with cold water and let stand one minute, drain and crack.

Pecans can be soaked six to eight hours in cold, salted water before cracking. To crack English walnuts, set them on the flat end and strike the pointed end with a hammer. They should snap in half.

CRACKING BLACK walnuts is probably the biggest challenge. Always wear gloves while hulling or your hands will be stained.

Pound with a hammer to remove the hull. Wash and dry nuts, soak 15 minutes in water or place in a wet cloth overnight. Then crack nuts with a hammer.

Some people do the hulling by putting the nuts in a bag and driving over them with the car. Then precede with the above instructions.

DIFFERENT NUTS require different prepping prior to using.

Almonds are easier to chop if still warm from toasting. To remove excess salt from packaged cashews, rub with a rough towel or place in boiling water for 30 seconds, drain and pat dry.

Toast hazelnuts (filberts) for seven to 10 minutes at 350 degrees, and rub gently with a towel. Cool slightly and slip skins off with your fingers.

Macadamia nuts are available in jars or cans and often are roasted in coconut oil and heavily salted. You can remove some of the salt off under running water and rub with a rough towel.

To remove the skin from pistachio nuts, pour boiling water over nuts and leave for two minutes, then drain, and rub with a rough towel and dry.

IT TAKES only a little imagination to make plain food company food by using nuts.

Add nuts to baked goods, cookies, cakes, muffins, quick breads or waffles. Use in cheese spreads, sauces, dips, salads and as a vegetable or casserole topping.

They can add just that extra crunch to make a dessert memorable. They are a baker's delight, readily available and certainly easy to use. Make your favorite foods more delicious by adding nuts.

A new way for bread pudding

AP — Remember how great caramel apples rolled in nuts tasted when you were a kid? Here are the same flavors, but now they're easier to eat.

CARAMEL-APPLE BREAD PUDDING

4 eggs
2 1/2 cups milk
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 cups dry whole-wheat bread cubes (about 3 slices)
One 6-ounce package dried apples, sliced
Caramel-Nut Sauce (recipe follows)

In a large mixing bowl, use a rotary

beater to beat together eggs, milk, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla and nutmeg. Set egg mixture aside. In an ungreased 8-by-1 1/4-inch round baking dish, toss together dry bread cubes and dried apples. Pour the egg mixture evenly over the bread-apple mixture. Bake in a 350-degree oven for 40 to 45 minutes or until the bread pudding tests done. Serve warm with Caramel-Nut Sauce. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Caramel-Nut Sauce
In a small saucepan, melt 1/4 cup margarine or butter. Stir in 1/4 cup packed brown sugar and 1 tablespoon light corn syrup. Cook and stir over medium heat until the mixture comes to a full boil. Stir in 1/4 cup

Pour the egg mixture evenly over the bread-apple mixture. Bake in a 350-degree oven for 40 to 45 minutes or until the bread pudding tests done.

whipping cream. Return to a full boil. Remove from the heat. Stir in 1/4 cup chopped pecans. Serve warm. Makes about 1 cup.
Nutrition information per serving: 477 cal, 10 g pro, 68 g carb, 21 g fat, 164 mg chol, 106 mg sodium.

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