**Pecans**

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1. **What are Pecans?**
   1. Pecans are typically knows as a true tree nut but actually a pecan is botanical fruit also known as a “drupe”. A drupe is a type of fruit in which an outer fleshy part surrounds a shell (otherwise known as a pit) with a seed inside. Some examples of drupes are peaches, plums, and cherries—but walnuts, almonds, and pecans are also drupes. They're just drupes in which we eat the seed inside the pit instead of the fruit! For the purpose of this presentation however we will refer to them as a nut because that’s the most common term.
   2. Pecans are a type of nut which comes from a tree in the hickory tree family.
   3. It takes 12 years for a pecan tree to mature. When grown in ideal conditions, it can live and stay productive for up to 300 years.
   4. Pecans are native to south central region of the United States and Mexico.
   5. The name “pecan” actually comes from an Algonquin (historic cultural group of Eastern North American) word which means “nut that requires a stone to crack”
2. **History of Pecans**
   1. Pecans have played a large role in the diet and cuisine of the cultures native to pecan growing climates. Many Native American tribes relied on pecans as a staple food in the fall and winter months and even traded pecans.
   2. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Spanish and French colonists began cultivating pecans and eventually began exporting them to other parts of the world. These plantings are documented to around 1711—about 60 years before the first recorded planting by U.S. colonists.
   3. The first U.S. pecan planting took place in Long Island, NY in 1772.
   4. New Orleans became very important to the marketing of pecans. The city is located right in the heart of the pecan tree’s natural habitat and became a major player in the growing pecan market of the 19th century.
   5. Pecan production has steadily increased in the United States since 1925, rising from 2.2 million pounds in 1920 to more than 400 million pounds in 2007. Before 1920, pecans were “hand-shelled” by consumers—in other words, they removed the shell themselves. With the development of commercial shelling equipment, the pecan industry began to grow.
   6. Pecans still play a large role in the culture and traditions in the southern United States. From pecan pie to pecan flavored coffee and ice cream, pecans are part of the South’s rich culinary heritage.
3. **Health Benefits**
4. Pecans contain more than 19 vitamins and minerals – including vitamin A, vitamin E, folic acid, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, several B vitamins and zinc just to name a few.
5. One ounce of pecans provides 10 percent of the recommended daily value of fiber.
6. Pecans are a natural, high-quality source of protein (9 grams per cup) and energy (685 calories per cup) that contains very few carbohydrates and no cholesterol.
7. Pecans are also naturally **sodium-free, rich** in antioxidants and a good source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats.
8. Eating about a handful of pecans each day may play a role in protecting the nervous system, according to a new animal study. The study, suggests adding pecans to your diet may delay the progression of age-related motor neuron degeneration.
9. Pecans rank highest among all nuts and are among the top category of foods to contain the highest antioxidant capacity, meaning pecans may decrease the risk of cancer, coronary heart disease, and neurological diseases such as Alzheimer’s.
10. Pecans are an excellent source of Vitamin E. Vitamin E is a powerful fat soluble antioxidant, which is used in the body to help maintain cell integrity and skin by protecting it from harmful free radicals and may provide a key element to neurological protection.
11. A review of pecan and other nut research, suggests that nuts like pecans may aid in weight loss and maintenance. It suggests that nut consumption may increase metabolic rates and enhance satiety. When used in conjunction with a healthy low-fat diet, nuts also offer increased flavor, palatability and texture that can lead to greater dietary compliance, according to the review.
12. As stated above pecans are rich in monounsaturated. This means by adding pecans to your diet, may decrease total cholesterol, and LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol) and increase HDL (good cholesterol).
13. Pecans are also rich in several B-complex vitamins, such as riboflavin, niacin, thiamin, pantothenic acid, vitamin B-6, and folate. These vitamins help with enzyme metabolisms inside the body amongst other things.

1. **Selection, Storage, and Preparation**
   1. Selection: There are over 1,000 varieties of pecans. Many are named for Native American Indian tribes. When it comes down to it however, pecans are pecans; the main distinctions are the size of the nut and the form. Pecans come in a variety of sizes – mammoth, extra large, large, medium, small and midget. They also come in several forms including whole pecans, pecan halves, pieces, granules and meal. When purchasing whole pecans in the shell, look for shells that are:
      * 1. Smooth shells with no cracks or blemishes
        2. Pecan shells should be light brown
        3. Fresh pecan shells may also look dusty and feature black marks
        4. When shaken, pecans shouldn’t rattle in the shell
        5. Purchase pecans which feel heavy for their size
        6. Shelled pecans should look plump, uniform in color, and never dry or shriveled.

What form and size of pecan you should purchase is going to depend on what you are doing with the pecans.

* 1. Storage: Always try and keep pecans in clean, cool and dry container to protect them from insects and odors. Beware that their high oil content absorbs foreign flavors readily. Pecans shelled or unshelled should be kept under refrigeration to best preserve their fresh color, aroma, and flavor.  The lower the temperature, the longer the nuts will keep pecans stored at room temperature in an airtight container will remain fresh for about 2 months; in the refrigerator they may be kept for about 9 months; and in the freezer, they will remain in good condition for 2 years. Remember to thaw the frozen nuts before using.  You may freeze your pecans again and again without affecting their quality or texture.
  2. Preparation: If buying a shelled pecan (no shell) there is not much preparation needed because for a shelled pecan to be ready to be sold, it must first be cleaned, sized, sterilized, cracked and finally shelled. If pecans are whole and in their shell-Choose a shelling tool and technique that suits the amount of pecans you need to crack.
     1. Hammer: Stand the nut on a solid surface on its flat end, then hit the top with a hammer
     2. Traditional Nutcracker: Position the pecan in the jaws of the pliers-like tool and gently squeeze the handles together to crack the nut. Some nutcracker sets also come with nut picks that you can use to lift stubborn pecans out of the shell.
     3. Electric Nutcracker: Place a pecan in the rotating cylinder, which can crack one every two seconds. Ideal for cracking a large amount of pecans.

1. **Fun Facts:** 
   1. Two locations can be considered the Pecan capital of the world: San Saba County in central Texas and Albany, Georgia.
   2. Albany boasts more than 600,000 pecan trees. Albany also hosts the annual National Pecan Festival, which includes a race, parade, pecan-cooking contest, the crowning of the National Pecan Queen and many other activities.
   3. April is National Pecan Month!
   4. Texas adopted the pecan tree as its state tree in 1919. In fact, Texas Governor James Hogg liked pecan trees so much that he asked if a pecan tree could be planted at his gravesite when he died.
   5. It takes a magnificent tree to produce a great-tasting nut. Pecan trees usually range in height from 70 to 100 feet, but some trees grow as tall as 150 feet or higher. Native pecan trees – those over 150 years old – have trunks more than three feet in diameter.
   6. Some of the larger pecan shellers process 150,000 pounds of pecans each day. That’s enough to make 300,000 pecan pies!
   7. The U.S. produces about 80 percent of the world’s pecan crop.
   8. It is speculated that pecans were used to produce a fermented intoxicating drink called “Powcohicora” (where the word “hickory” comes from)
   9. Pecans could even improve your love life? If the body does not get enough zinc, it may have difficulty producing testosterone – a key hormone in initiating sexual desire in both men and women. Pecans provide nearly 10 percent of the recommended daily value for zinc. So, pass on the oysters and reach for a handful of pecans!



