A Guide for Using Pecans

PERFECT PERFORMANCE with pecans
Harvesting & Grading

With a rich history tracing back to the 16th century, the pecan is the only major tree nut that naturally grows in North America. Globally, the largest pecan producer is the United States. Mechanical harvesting techniques and prompt pick-up of pecans have helped to enhance the quality and extend the storage life of these tree nuts.

The pecan shell functions as a natural protective barrier. Although pecans have a hard, thick shell, they are easier to shell than many other North American nut species. Pecans go through rigorous sanitation to ensure product safety. Pecans are first rinsed to remove foreign objects. Then the pecans are either washed in chlorine, a hot sanitizing bath or a combination of the two. After shelling, the pecans are sized and then dried to reduce moisture and maintain quality. The wet shelling process significantly reduces the risk of aflatoxin, E. coli and Salmonella contamination.

Shelled nuts are graded to meet and exceed the U.S. Department of Agriculture Standards for Grades of Shelled Pecans. Pecans are inspected for any defects, foreign materials, uniformity in size and color, firmness and amount of meat in proportion to size. The top grade is U.S. No. 1.

Shipping

Pecan halves and pieces are generally shipped in 30 lbs./13.6 kg. corrugated boxes with or without vacuum-packed polyvinyl liners. Shelling will reduce weight and bulk of inshell product by approximately one half.

Storage

Pecans should be protected from moisture, light, heat and oxygen to preserve freshness. Storing inshell pecans in a cool, dry place will preserve freshness for several months. In shell or shelled, pecans can be stored under refrigeration for about nine months, or frozen at 0°F/-17.7°C for up to two years. They can be thawed and refrozen repeatedly without loss of flavor or texture. After removal from cold storage, the quality remains good for about two months.

THE TOP 10 COMMERCIAL BUYERS OF PROCESSED PECANS

1. Retail grocers/ snack products
2. Commercial packers of mixed nuts & package nut products
3. Commercial baked goods manufacturers
4. Ice cream manufacturers
5. Confectioners
6. Wholesale distributors
7. Restaurants, hotels, resorts
8. Foodservice other than restaurants/hotels
9. Mail catalog sales
10. Cereal manufacturers

VALUE-ADDED ATTRIBUTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FLAVOR</th>
<th>USER-FRIENDLY</th>
<th>AROMA</th>
<th>TEXTURE</th>
<th>APPEARANCE</th>
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<td>The extra full flavor of pecans can add a rich, meaty taste to salads, baked goods and savory prepared main dishes. The flavor is compatible with that of most foods and can be varied from their natural state to sweetened, salted or spiced.</td>
<td>Chopped pecans offer labor savings to busy cooks.</td>
<td>The characteristic sweet pecan odor is present primarily in pecan oils, enhancing the appeal in finished products.</td>
<td>A soft crunch can add delicious contrast and extend chewy mouth-feel to salads, muffins, vegetable dishes and desserts.</td>
<td>Pecans are classified according to the predominant skin color. Classifications range from “light” to “light amber,” “amber” and “dark amber.”</td>
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Antioxidant-Rich Pecans

Naturally-occurring antioxidants in pecans may help contribute to heart health and disease prevention, according to a study published in The Journal of Nutrition. Antioxidants are dietary substances that are believed to delay aging and decrease the risk of cancer, heart disease, and neurological diseases like Alzheimer's. Researchers at Loma Linda University discovered that after eating pecans, gamma-tocopherols (a form of the antioxidant Vitamin E) doubled in their test subjects and unhealthy oxidation of LDL (bad) cholesterol decreased by as much as 33 percent. Pecans have more antioxidants than any other tree nut, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Using a method called Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC), researchers analyzed 277 different foods and found that pecans rank highest among all nuts in antioxidant capacity.

Cholesterol-Lowering Pecans

Pecans also may play a role in lowering cholesterol. Clinical research published in the Journal of Nutrition compared the Step-I diet (28 percent fat) recommended at the time by the American Heart Association for individuals with high cholesterol levels, to a pecan-enriched (40 percent fat) diet. The result was that the pecan-enriched diet lowered total cholesterol levels by 11.3 percent, and LDL “bad” cholesterol levels by 16.5 percent, twice that of the Step-I diet, without any associated weight gain. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has acknowledged this and related research and approved the following qualified health claim, “Scientific evidence suggests but does not prove that eating 1.5 ounces (.04 kg.) per day of most nuts, such as pecans, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease.”

Pecans May Provide Neurological Protection

Research published in Current Topics in Nutraceutical Research suggests that pecans may play a role in protecting the nervous system. The study, conducted at the Center for Cellular Neurobiology at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, demonstrates that pecans likely contributed to a delay in the progression of age related motor neuron degeneration in mice. Researchers suggest the antioxidants in pecans may be the reason for this positive sign.

Weight Control and Pecans

A review of pecan and other nut research, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (September 2003), suggests that nuts like pecans can aid in weight loss and maintenance. The review cited studies indicating that nut consumption may increase metabolic rates and enhance satiety. When used in conjunction with a low-fat diet, nuts also offer increased flavor, palatability and texture that can lead to greater dietary compliance, according to the review.
Nutritious, Versatile, Flavorful

Shelled pecans can be purchased in halves and in pieces. The pecans themselves vary in size, length, and color depending on the variety. These sizes range from Mammoth to Junior Mammoth, Jumbo, Extra Large, Large, Medium, and Topper. Select pecans in whatever size you need but always remember to choose quality. The best filled nuts, and those with good color, are considered highest quality.

Contact your supplier for specifications on the pecan product of your choice.