Indulge in nuts for good health

Tree nuts are plentiful during the late fall. Nuts are healthy, providing protein, fiber and some vitamins and minerals. The fat in nuts is mostly unsaturated and nuts contain no cholesterol. Unless salted, nuts are low in sodium.

Selecting Nuts. Choose clean, unshelled nuts free from splits, cracks, and holes. Nuts in the shell should be heavy for their size, indicating a fresh, meaty kernel. Nutmeats that rattle in their shell are usually stale. Crisp, plump, and meaty nutmeats indicate high quality; limp, rubbery, or shriveled nutmeats indicate poor quality.

Suppliers often sell cracked nuts in the shell in plastic bags. Remove cracked nuts from plastic bags immediately and spread them out on trays in an airy location. If left in plastic bags, cracked nuts are susceptible to mold growth. Return or discard any nuts showing mold growth.

Using Nuts. To shell black walnuts and hickories, use a heavy-duty hammer, or nut cracker. Pecans are fairly easy to shell. Most Missouri nut growers do not recommend soaking nuts before cracking, because it toughens nutmeats, adds moisture, and encourages mold growth.

Nut Storage. Missouri black walnuts, pecans, and hickories are harvested in the fall. For year-round use, store nuts as soon as they are thoroughly dry.

Unshelled nuts have a longer shelf life than shelled nuts. Properly dried unshelled nuts will keep for several weeks at room temperature. Store unshelled nuts in airtight containers in a cool, dry, dark location, below 70°F to ensure good quality for about four months.

Spice up foods with nuts.
Add nuts to homemade trail mix. Sprinkle baked squash, sweet potatoes, or apples with chopped nuts. Nuts add texture and taste appeal to fruit, vegetable, and main dish salads. Sprinkle hot cereal with chopped nuts, or add them to baked goods.

To Roast Nuts. Roasted nuts are more flavorful than raw dried nuts. Use roasted nuts within two to three weeks.

In the oven. Spread shelled nuts in a shallow pan and bake at 350°F for 5 to 12 minutes, stirring occasionally, until nutmeats turn golden brown.

For richer flavor, toss each cup of nutmeats with one teaspoon of vegetable oil before roasting.

Stove top. Heat for 10 to 15 minutes in a heavy skillet, until lightly browned, stirring frequently. Spread on paper towels to cool and drain.

Whole, shelled nutmeats remain fresh longer than nuts in pieces—so chop nuts just before using. Unsalted nuts keep longer than salted nutmeats.

For long-term storage, package shelled nuts in moisture/vapor proof containers and store in the refrigerator or freezer.

Source: http://missourifamilies.org/features/nutritionarticles/harvesttohealth/nuts.htm

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A popular way to celebrate holidays or any party occasion is to invite friends and family to a buffet. However, this type of food service, where foods are left out for long periods, leave the door open for uninvited guests — bacteria that cause food-borne illness. Festive times for giving and sharing should not include sharing food-borne illness.

To keep parties safe, have all chefs and “helpers” wash hands before and after handling food. Keep all kitchen, dishes and utensils clean also. Always serve food on clean plates — not those previously holding raw meat or poultry. Otherwise, bacteria which may have been present in raw meat juices can cross contaminate the food to be served. If foods are cooked ahead of time for parties, cook foods thoroughly. Partial cooking is unsafe.

- Heat beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops to 145°F.
- Cook all cuts of pork to 160°F.
- Ground beef, veal and lamb to 160°F.
- Cook all poultry to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

Use Shallow Containers.
Divide cooked foods into shallow containers to store in the refrigerator or freezer until serving. This encourages rapid and even cooling. Reheat hot foods to 165°F.

Arrange and serve food on several small platters, rather than on one large platter. Keep the rest of the food hot in the oven (set at 200-250°F); or cold in the refrigerator, until serving time. Replace empty platters with clean ones, rather than adding fresh food to a dish that already had food in it. Many people’s hands may have been taking food from the dish, which has also been sitting out at room temperature.

The Two-Hour Rule. Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything out after two hours.

Keep hot foods HOT and cold foods COLD. Hold hot foods at 140°F or warmer. On the buffet table, use chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays to keep hot foods hot. Hold cold foods at 40°F or colder. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice. Otherwise, use small serving trays and replace them often.

Food-borne Bacteria. Bacteria are everywhere, but a few types especially like to crash parties.

Staphylococcus aureus. Staphylococcus (“staph”) bacteria are found on our skin, in infected cuts and pimples, and in our noses and throats. They are spread by improper food handling. Prevention includes: washing hands and utensils before preparing and handling foods and not letting prepared foods — particularly cooked and cured meats and cheese and meat salads — sit at room temperature more than two hours.

Clostridium perfringens. "Perfringens" is called the "cafeteria germ" because it may be found in foods served in quantity and left for long periods of time on steam tables, or at room temperature. To prevent, divide large portions of cooked foods such as beef, turkey, gravy, dressing, stews and casseroles into smaller portions for serving and cooling. Keep cooked foods hot or cold, not lukewarm.

Listeria monocytogenes. Because Listeria bacteria multiply, although slowly, at refrigeration temperatures, these bacteria can be found in cold foods served on buffets. To avoid, follow "keep refrigerated" label directions and carefully observe "sell by" and "use by" dates on processed products; thoroughly reheat frozen or refrigerated processed meat and poultry products before consumption.

Storing and using chestnuts

Chestnuts can be roasted, toasted, or added to stuffing. Chestnuts are available in the produce section of most grocery stores from late September through December.

Like any produce, these nuts are perishable and have a limited shelf life. While fresh chestnuts generally have 40-50% moisture, yeasts and bacteria are found on nuts that have been stored in an overly moist condition.

Selection. Choose chestnuts with clean outer shells that are a shiny brown color. The tan-colored end of the nuts should be free of mold. The freshest chestnuts are very firm and do not dent when pressed. When cut, the “nutmeat” should be yellow. Avoid chestnuts with blue streaking through the nut, a vinegary smell, or a slimy feel to the nut.

Storage. Store chestnuts in a ventilated plastic bag in the refrigerator; use within a few weeks. To keep chestnuts for one or two months, store them at a cooler temperature (30°F). For year-round use, seal them in a freezer bag and place them in the freezer.

Preparation. Before using chestnuts, cure nuts at room temperature for 3 to 5 days, then roast. During the curing process, starch in the nut is converted to sugar, resulting in a sweeter flavor. Once the nuts have cured, the shells will dent slightly when they are squeezed.

Roasting outdoors. Because of the high moisture content of the nut, the outer shells are slit open with a sharp knife before roasting. A single slit across the widest part of the nuts will release the moisture during cooking and prevent the nuts from bursting during roasting, but peeling is easier if two crossing slits are made into the shell.

Roasting indoors. Place the nuts on a cookie sheet in the oven at 425°F for 25 minutes, (roasting outdoors will require a longer cooking time). After nuts are cooked, let them cool for five minutes and peel while they are still warm. Remove the outer shell and the inner papery “skin” (e.g., pellicle) from the nut before eating them. So, when Jack Frost starts nipping at your nose, have fun roasting chestnuts!


Nutty Math

One pound of unshelled nuts yields:

- 2-1/4 cups pecan halves
- 3/4 to 1 cup black walnuts
- 2 cups chopped pecans
- 1-1/4 cups hickory nuts

Dear Readers:

This is the final issue of QFK for the season. Please help us meet your needs better by filling out the enclosed survey. We appreciate your comments and suggestions for future topics.

Remember we’re available year round to answer your food safety questions, just call your local extension office.

Sincerely,

Mary & Judy
Whole wheat apple nut bread

- 1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 3 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/3 cup raisins
- 1 egg
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 1 tbs. wheat germ

Yield: 1 loaf.

Sift together all-purpose flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. Stir in whole-wheat flour, brown sugar, and raisins. In a separate bowl, beat egg and oil and stir in yogurt, applesauce, and nuts. Gently stir applesauce mixture into flour mixture, until dry ingredients are moistened.

Pour batter into greased 1 1/2-quart or 2-quart casserole dish and sprinkle with wheat germ. Bake at 350°F for one hour, or until wooden toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pan for ten minutes. Remove from pan and finish cooling on a rack.

Source: Missouri Families, [http://missourifamilies.org/features/nutritionarticles/harvesttohealth/nuts.htm](http://missourifamilies.org/features/nutritionarticles/harvesttohealth/nuts.htm)