

WALNUTS

**Ingredient
of the Month**



Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation
and Clemson University

Walnuts have been cultivated for millennia and are considered the oldest tree food known to man. The fruit of the walnut tree grows in temperature zones throughout the world. Early history indicates that walnuts came from ancient Persia; thus, the walnut is often referred to as the “Persian walnut.” Romans referred to walnuts as *Juglans regia* or “Jupiter’s royal acorn” and spread them into North Africa and Western Europe, and as far north as England, where they assumed the name “English walnuts.” To this day, English walnuts are considered the most widely available and cultivated variety.

Another common variety is black walnuts, which are native to the United States and are grown from New England to Minnesota and to Florida. Black walnut trees were important to Native American Indians who relied on their dyes, their bark and leaves

as healing agents and utilized nuts as a food source. Today, the leading commercial producers of walnuts are the United States, Turkey, China, Iran, France and Romania.

The edible portion of walnuts is protected by an outer shell, which helps maintain the quality of the nut. With their crunchy texture and nutty, slightly sweet flavor, walnuts are delicious in a wide variety of sweet and savory dishes, from salads to soups and from ice cream to pastries. They’re also used to make fragrant, flavorful oil. Classic flavor pairings with walnuts are bananas, dried fruits, cream cheese and blue cheese. While fall is harvest season for walnuts, they are available shelled, in halves or in pieces year-round. They also contain significant antioxidants, omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E, making them a nutritious and versatile food.

Healthy ingredient contribution

VITAMIN E: Walnuts contain Vitamin E in the gamma-tocopherol form, which can aid in men’s cardiovascular health. Vitamin E also functions as an antioxidant.

PHYTONUTRIENTS: Walnuts are a source of phytonutrients (organic components of plants that promote health) that function as antioxidants and anti-inflammatory nutrients, and are thought to reduce the risk of certain cancers.

OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS: Walnuts are the only nuts that offer a significant amount of the omega-3 fat alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). ALA’s anti-inflammatory properties halt plaque buildup in the arteries that results when “bad” LDL cholesterol is oxidized. Omega-3 is also linked with improved glucose control and stronger bones.

MINERALS: Walnuts are a source of calcium, magnesium, and potassium, which are part of their benefits to the cardiovascular system.

PROTEIN: As a plant source of protein, walnuts offer protein without the saturated fat and cholesterol associated with animal sources of protein. Protein from foods is broken down into amino acids that are later used for a variety of bodily functions, such as transporting nutrients and oxygen in the bloodstream and maintaining proper fluid and pH balance.

FIBER: Walnuts contain soluble fiber, which has been shown to help reduce the risks for cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes by lowering blood cholesterol and controlling blood sugar levels.

Varieties and uses

- **English walnuts** are the most widely available walnut and come in many varieties—some with moderately thick shells and others with thin and easy-to-crack shells. They are available year-round and come in three main sizes: large, medium and babies. Also known as the Persian or European walnuts, they are delicious in all kinds of sweet and savory dishes.
- **Black walnuts** grow inside a darker shell, but the nutmeat is similar in appearance to the English walnut. They are known for their spicy flavor and high oil content. Black walnuts having a slightly higher protein content and slightly less fat than the English variety. Since they have a tougher outside shell and are difficult to extract whole, they are often sold in pieces.
- **Green walnuts**, also known as “wet” walnuts, are used in pickling and preserving because when young, the entire nut, including the skin that will eventually become the shell, is edible.
- **Sorrento walnut** is an Italian variety with a smooth shell and pleasant flavor. It is mostly used in commercial confectionery because the nut can be easily extracted whole from the shell.
- **Walnut oil** is a nutty-flavored oil extracted from the walnut meat. It’s normally used to add flavor to cooked foods instead of in cooking the food like other oils.



Storage

- Walnuts in shell should be stored in a cool, dry place up to 3 months.
- Shelled nutmeats should be refrigerated, tightly covered, up to 6 months. They can be frozen up to a year.
- Walnut oil should be stored in a cool, dark place for up to 3 months; refrigerate to prevent rancidity.

Serving size

¼ cup of walnuts provides:

- 2.5 grams of ALA, the plant-based source of omega-3 fatty acid
- 4 grams of protein
- 2 grams of fiber

Contributions to this article were made by Tim Foxworth.

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RECIPE

MAPLE/WALNUT HUMMUS

Yield: 12 servings (serving size: ¼ cup)

Ingredients:

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| 1 cup walnut halves | 1 t. fresh lime juice |
| 1 (15½ oz.) chickpeas
(garbanzo beans), rinsed
and drained | ½ t. orange zest |
| ¼ cup fresh orange juice | ½ t. cinnamon |
| ¼ cup maple syrup | 3 apples , sliced* |
| 2 T. unsweetened applesauce | |

Method:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place walnuts on baking sheet; toast in oven for 8 minutes or until golden brown. Cool to room temperature. Place toasted walnuts, chickpeas, orange juice, maple syrup, applesauce, lime juice, orange zest and cinnamon in food processor; process until smooth. Serve with apple slices.



Nutrition Information

Calories: 90	Fiber: 2g	Calcium: 2%
Fat: 5g	Protein: 3g	Iron: 4%
Sat. Fat: 0g	Vitamin A: 0%	
Carbs: 11g	Vitamin C: 6%	

*Nutrition analysis does not include apple slices.

This recipe was tested by Clemson University's Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.