

FARMER IN THE FIELD



NUTS!

By Bonnie Swank

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Growing up my family lived on a half acre with a number of almond trees. As a little girl it seemed so big with all those trees to climb. Every year when the nuts were ready to harvest we would lay tarps on the ground and bang on the limbs of the trees with wooden poles. It was great fun watching the nuts fall to the ground like rain. Since we lived in an area where almonds and walnuts grew we would send the nuts off to a local packing shed to be shelled, returning only the delicious meat of the nuts. Have you ever blanched an almond? It's great fun. Mom would fill up a bowl full of hot water and soak the nuts until the skins got soft. Then my brother and sister and I would pinch the nut launching the meat out of the skin like little rockets. After that my mother would lay them on a baking sheet and toast them in the oven making a delicious snack for us to enjoy for months to come.

California is the almond capital of the world with over 110,000 acres of almond trees. And even with a lot fewer orchards than there used to be California walnuts still contribute to the world nut market. It does however make me sad every time I see an orchard pulled out due to falling nut prices driven down by overseas competitors. As far as I'm concerned there is nothing better than California nuts with almonds, walnuts, pistachios and pecans being some of my favorites. So, with the harvest over and the baking season approaching, it's time to stock up on these healthy great tasting little morsels.

Nut Facts:

Nuts can be stored in the pantry or refrigerator. When storing nuts, be sure to use an airtight, odorless container, as nuts can absorb odors of other foods. Nuts stored in the refrigerator will stay fresher longer.

Walnuts are rich in omega-3 fatty acid, something the body cannot create. An increase of omega-3s in your diet will help protect against heart disease and cancer. In fact, the latest research shows that eating just a handful of walnuts every day will lower cholesterol and make for a healthier heart.

Toasting nuts adds extra flavor and crispness. For best results, toast in the oven or on the stovetop. Nuts toasted in the microwave do not develop as much flavor or crunch. Toasting time depends on both the size and variety of the nut.

- **Oven Toasting:** Spread nuts in a single layer on an ungreased baking pan. Place in 350°F oven and bake 5 to 12 minutes or until nuts are golden brown; stir once or twice until toasty and fragrant. Remove from pan to cool. Nuts will continue to brown slightly after removed from oven.
- **Stove-Top Toasting:** Place nuts in a heavy skillet over medium heat and stir or toss continuously until nuts turn a golden brown and smell toasty and fragrant, approximately 3 to 8 minutes.