

Title:

Nuts

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Summary:

Everything you ever wanted to know about nuts.

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brazil nut, macadamia nut, almond seed, legume, tuber peanut, bunya bunya, pine nut, red bopple nut, cocunut candle nut, palm nut, macadamia nut, water chestnut, chestnut cashew nut, ginkgo nut, hazelnut

Article Body:

Since the earliest of time and even before agriculture was used by the Greeks to have better food resources, 'Nuts' were a stable food and nutritional source in the diet of manhood in the dark ages. During those times, nuts were plentiful, as there were much more forests as today, and well liked for their easy storage, which enabled people to keep them for times in which food was hard to find. (Winter, rainy season, etc).

There is evidence that as far back as the second century B.C., the Romans distributed sugar almonds on special occasions such as marriages and births.

Nuts have their place in all cultures and through almost all cuisine around the world. Nuts are liked by people of all ages for their subtle taste and high fat and carbohydrate content. It is this subtle taste that Chefs like when creating new dishes and variations.

DESCRIPTION & SPECIES

Under the category nuts, we understand anything from a seed to a legume or tuber. The peanut, as an example, is a legume, the Brazil nut and macadamia nut are seeds and almonds are the seed of a fruit similar to a peach.

Botanically nuts are single seeded fruits with a hard or leathery shell that contain a edible kernel, which is enclosed in a soft inner skin.

Generally, all nut trees grow slowly but live long. Trees of walnut, chestnut or pecan continue to produce nuts, often more than hundred years after planting.

Nut trees of any species are found all over the world. Almonds for example are found in California, Spain, Morocco, Italy and even Australia, where as the walnut can be found anywhere from North America to the Andes and Persia to Australia. Asia also has a great variety of nuts. Ginkgo nuts in China, candle nuts in Indonesia and Malaysia, coconut in throughout southern Asia, cashew nuts in India and Malaysia and the Philippines, chestnuts in China and Japan, and the water chestnut which is found in China, Japan, Korea and the East Indies.

SOME OF THE BETTER KNOWN NUTS :

ALMOND

Scientist consider the almond as a stone fruit, much like cherries, peaches and prunes.

Because most people only know the seed (stone) of this fruit, it is generally accepted as a nut.

Almond on the tree, look like small green peaches. When ripe the shell will open and reveal the nut in its shell.

There are various varieties of almonds.

The bitter almond is in fact the kernel of the apricot, which was found growing wild in China as far back as the late Tang Dynasty (AD 619-907).

This same apricot was taken to Europe and became the apricot fruit, which is now enjoyed all over the world. The bitter almond kernel is toxic in its raw state and must be boiled quickly and poached in a oven before being further used. It is primarily used in Chinese desserts like the almond bean curd.

The sweet almond is generally confined for fresh consumption. In 1986, California alone produced 70,000 tons of almonds, which is half of the world's production. The almond has been cultivated around the Mediterranean since ancient times and can still be found wild in Algeria and around the black sea. Sweet almonds can be bought whole, shelled, cut in 1/2 with skin, without skin, flaked, blanched, slivered ground roasted or salted. they are used for snacks, marzipan, confectionery, and desserts as well as for the production of liqueur essence, oil and cosmetic products.

BUNYA BUNYA PINE NUT

The bunya bunya tree is a member of the pine family and grows almost everywhere

in Australia. Originally the trees originated in the area of Brisbane and Rockhampton in Queensland Australia. Only the female trees are producing a 2cm x 2.5cm nut in the pinecone.

In the old days, the bunya bunya pine nuts were staple food for the aborigines and also used in ceremonials. These days, the nuts gain in popularity through the trend of native food in Australia (bush food) in recent years.

The nut is rich in carbohydrate, similar to the chestnut, and therefore used more like a potato than a nut. the bunya bunya nuts can be eaten raw but are usually boiled for easy removing of the skin. Shelled nuts are then butter fried and flavored with pepper or sugar, or added to stews and soups.

RED BOPPLE NUT

The red bopple nuts are a relative of the macadamia nut, and native to the tropical rain forest of the East Coast of Australia.

The nut is about the same size as a hazelnut and has a thick (0.5cm to 1cm), woody husk with a bright red outer skin, which only appears if the nut is fully ripe.

In contrast to most other nuts, the red bopple nut is very low on fat, but very high in calcium and potassium. the low fat content makes this nut very easy to digest. The nuts are eaten raw or toasted.

COCONUT

"He who plants a coconut tree", the saying goes, "plants food and drink, vessels and clothing, a habitation for himself and a heritage for his children". Indeed every part of the coconut is used, but only the coconut milk and the coconut meat are foods. The shell is used as charcoal, the husk is used to make ropes, clothing and brushes, and the trunk of the tree and leaves are used for roofs of houses and building material respectively.

The fruit of the palm 'cocos nucifera' has an edible kernel and therefore qualifies as a nut. The palm tree is native to the Philippines, Malaysia, Brazil and Indonesia, and can produce 50 - 100 nuts a year, over a life span of 70 years. Coconut palms grow best close to the seaside but have been proven to withstand high altitude, although the production rate is diminishing as further away from the sea the tree grows.

The large thick green pod encloses a brown fibrous husk around a brown shell ,

which contains a layer of soft white flesh and the clear water in the center. Sub-species found only on one island of the Seychelles, in the Indian Ocean, produces a nut often weighing more than 20 kg, which needs 10 years to ripen.

Coconuts are the worlds most commercially used nuts. Especially the meat, or copra, as it is called after sun drying, is vital for the export industries, in coconut growing countries. The coconut is a important food source especially in South East Asia, India, Brazil and the South Pacific Islands.

The copra can be brought shredded or desiccated and is used in confectioneries, ice creams and to coat chicken or fish for frying. However much of it is pressed for its oil also called coconut butter as it is white and fatty at room temperature. Not only is it used for cooking and to make margarine, but it also goes into soaps, detergents, shampoos, face cream, perfumes and candles.

It is also a major ingredient in glycerin, synthetic rubber, safety glass and hydraulic brake fluid. Coconut juice or milk is the natural juice of the nut, but not the water inside the coconut. It is won by shredding the raw coconut meat, then adding water and straining the mixture through a cotton cloth. The coconut milk has then the consistency and color of skim milk and is available canned or frozen.

CANDLE NUT

The candle nut gets her name, from when threaded tightly on the midrib of a palm leaf it has been used a primitive candle. More recently, the nuts were ground to a paste, mixed with copra (grated coconut meat) and then formed into a candle.

Candlenuts are the seed of the candle berry tree native to Indonesia and Malaysia but widely spread throughout south East Asia, the South Pacific and Sri Lanka.

The nut has a very high content on fat and is valued for the extracted oil for lighting as well as cooking. The nut is colored gray to black, about 5cm in diameter, with a thin, papery husk containing one or two nuts.

Candlenut oil for lighting purposes is extracted by roasting the nuts when they are only half ripe as oil for cooking is extracted by roasting the nuts when they are fully ripe. For human consumption, the nuts have to be roasted as raw once have been causing sicknesses.

Ripe candle nuts are roasted, then pounded into a meal and mixed with salt,

chilies or shrimp paste for usage in curries or as a spicy condiment to curries. Traditionally, the Javanese have roasted the nuts for eating in the whole.

PALM NUT

The palmyra palm native to most South East Asian Countries produces a hard, shiny nut, from which a sweetish sap or gel is extracted. While this sap is used in the Indonesian cuisine for soups and desserts, it is on other well known product that is begin produced out of the palmyra palm - The Palm Sugar (gula melacca).

There are not reliable data available on the nutritional value of the palm nut, but it is widely known that the fat is saturated.

MACADAMIA NUT

Native to Queensland and New South Wales in Australia, the macadamia nut takes its name from Dr John McAdam, a scientist and early promoter of the cultivation Australia.

The macadamia trees are evergreen and reach a height of up to 20 meters. The edible seed of the silk oat tree has a very hard, light brown shell, 2 - 3cm in diameter.

In 1888, macadamia trees have been planted in Hawaii where through careful cloning and hybridization, it became an important commercial product.

Today, macadamia nuts are also cultivated in South Africa, Zimbabwe, California and parts of South and Central America.

It is very difficult to crack the macadamia nut as it's shell is very hard and so tight to the kernel that when cracked the nut is smashed. In Hawaii, American scientist developed a way of separating the kernel from the shell by shrinking them in drying bins. They then developed the first commercial cracker. It was through these two developments that the macadamia nut could be formed to the commercial importance it has today.

This is also the reason why macadamia nuts are only available already de-shelled. Macadamia nuts also are valued for their oil and the macadamia nut butter.

They are available roasted and salted. When buying macadamia nuts, give care that they are packed in a air tight or vacuum bags, as they become easily rancid

once opened.

Macadamia nuts are used for confectioneries or as snacks, but also gain in popularity in the kitchen as they have a very mild and subtle taste and add texture to salads, and hot dishes. It's oil makes excellent vinaigrette and cold sauces.

WATER CHESTNUTS

The name refers to a nut like tuber of a aquatic plant called Trapa. The plants are common to several parts of the world, but are mainly used in Japan, China and Thailand where it is also a sought after ingredient in it's cuisines.

The trapa plant roots in ponds and lakes and sends, its' leaves to the surface, similar to a water lily. The water chestnut grows on the roots underneath the water surface. Water chestnuts are flat and round with a diameter of 5 - 7cm. They have a soft black skin and white flesh similar to the flesh of a coconut. Once peeled, they can be eaten raw, or dried and are a well liked ingredient because its crunchy texture, and sweet subtle taste. Water chestnuts are also boiled and made into flour, which is used for thickening of sauces and dishes, much like cornstarch.

CHESTNUT

Chestnuts are thought to have originated in Southern Europe and Persia even though they are also found in China, Japan and Northern America.

The nuts of the chestnut tree have a brown shiny color and leathery shell. they can be eaten raw, but mostly are consume boiled, baked or roasted or as a chestnut puree sweetened or unsweetened. They are also sold in syrup as marron glaces.

Chestnuts are the only nuts, which are treated like a vegetable because they contain more starch (30%) and less fat 3%.

Chestnuts are also made into a flour high on fiber and starch.

CASHEW NUT

Originating in the West Indies and native to the north of Brazil, Portuguese explorers introduced the nut to India and Malaysia as well as parts of Africa.

The hard-shelled nut grows inside the cashew apple. When mature the cashew nut

appears at the end of the red or yellow apple. The cashew tree is a member of the poison ivy family and farmers must take great precautions when extracting the nuts. The hard shell contains an oil, which irritates the skin, so the nuts are heated to extract the kernel. The smoke and steam, which occurs however may still be harmful to skin and eyes. When heated the cashew nuts are harmless and may be extracted.

GINKGO NUT

The ginkgo is the prehistoric maidenhair tree, which survives as a wild tree only in China.

The fruit looks like a tiny plum but has a foul and bitter shell. the Chinese wait for the smelly hull to fall off, then paint the nuts and use them for festive decorations, before they crack them open to eat the nut. In Japan and Korea, ginkgo nuts are skewered and then grilled, which turns the nuts color from yellow to green. In China, the ginkgo nut is a popular ingredient to vegetarian dishes. The nuts can be obtained fresh or canned.

HAZELNUT/FILBERTS

The nut of the hazel bush is native to Europe and North America and was mentioned in writings as far back as 2838 B.C., and was credited of currying many human ills as well as being considered excellent for Boldness and use as a hair tonic. Some say that the name filbert comes from Saint Philibert, a French abbot whose feast day on 22 August coincides with the ripening of the first nuts in the Northern hemisphere.

Hazelnuts have a very hard shell, which has to be cracked by a nutcracker before getting to the kernel. Hazelnuts are available, raw, blanched, or toasted, chopped, ground, cooking as well as hazelnut liquor.

PEANUT

The peanut is not a true nut. It is the seed of a leguminous plant with a soft, brownish colored brittle shell and belong to the Botanical family of beans and peas. But they are usually considered along with the nuts because of they're physical characteristics and nutritional value. The nuts grow on the long roots of the plant and below the ground. The peanut is native to Brazil and has been found there ever since the first recording in 950 B.C..

Today, peanuts are cultivated throughout the tropics all over the world (India, China, West Africa, Australia and the USA are the largest peanut growing

countries). Peanuts produce excellent oil, which is used for salads and cold dishes as well as for frying. Peanuts also produce peanut butter, margarine, and also used in canning of sardines. Peanuts are available whole, de-shelled and de-skinned and raw or toasted. Peanuts are used in all different varieties in everything from salads to main courses and desserts.

PINENUT

These are the edible seed of the pine tree and grow in the cone. Pine trees are found in the Southern USA, Mexico and around the Mediterranean sea. It is very difficult to establish a pinenut industry as the trees are growing very slow and don't carry a lot of fruits until they're 75 years old.

Pine nuts are mostly obtained raw and then toasted, fried or grilled. Pine nut oil is used for the cosmetic industry. Pine nut flour is used in confectionery.

PISTACHIO NUT

The pistachio nut is a small green kernel, which grows on the pistachio tree originating in Syria, Palestine and Persia.

The natural color of the shell is grayish white, but some times the nuts are dyed red to cover up some of the staining.

The pistachio nut is now cultivated in India, Europe, North Africa, Mexico, the USA and the Far East. Pistachios are usually sold in their shell or shelled and blanched.

The greenish seed is used as flavoring in cooking, candies and ice cream.

WALNUT

The walnut is related to the hickory and pecan tree and grows anywhere from North America to the Andes and Europe to China. English walnuts, butternuts and hickory nuts are all walnuts, botanical speaking. All those walnuts have different shells and kernels but the English walnut with it's rough, rippled shell and yellow brown kernel is the most popular and popularly referred to as 'The Walnut'.

Walnuts are bought in the shell or de-shelled and are sought after for their oil, which is used for cooking as well as for salads and dressing.

OTHER COMMONLY USED NUTS INCLUDE :

Macadamia Nuts)	
Bunya Bunya Pine Nuts)	Australia
Red Bobble Nut)	
Candle Nut)	Malaysia
Palm Nut)	Philippines, Brazil
Coconut)	Indonesia, China
Water Chestnut)	
Brazil Nuts)	South America
Beech Nuts)	USA
Pecan Nuts)	North America

NUTRITIONAL VALUE AND INFORMATION

Nuts are rich in fat (40-60%) and dietary fiber (5-15%) with moderate amount of protein (2-25%) and small amounts of starch (up to 10%). As mentioned above chestnuts are an exemption to this general rule.

The fats in nuts are mostly monounsaturated and polyunsaturated and contain no cholesterol as nuts are harvested from plants. Only the coconut and palm nut contain saturated fats.

Significant amounts of minerals can be found in nuts, including zinc, calcium, iron, phosphorus and magnesium.

They also contain some provitamins and vitamins like thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and vitamin E & C.

Nuts contain very little natural sodium and have a high amount of potassium, which in this constellation is recommended for the control of blood pressure.

Unfortunately nuts are often sold salted as snacks, which upsets this natural balance, and by a over consummation of salted nuts people take in a lot of fat and salt.

Nuts are also a great source of energy and often used in diets for athletes.

Used in moderate amounts, nuts in unsalted forms are nutritionally valuable food.

USAGE OF NUTS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL CHEF

One does not know where to start where to compile information about the usage of nuts and nut related product in today's hospitality. In the kitchens, there is no limit on the amount of dishes and creations a Chef can use nuts or nut products for. From appetizers to salads, soups and desserts, with cheese, fish, pasta, meats and vegetables, nuts are very versatile and do not have a overpowering flavor, and its subtle taste and crunchy texture adopt early to almost all given products as a supplement.

Nut oils are also widely used for dressings, frying and flavoring of hot and cold dishes. Nut liqueurs can be a welcome supplement to savory sauces as well as pastry sauces and creams, marzipan and other nut pastes are often used to produced chocolates and confectionery items. In the Indian cuisine, a cashew nut paste is often used for the thickening of curries and sauces. Through the wide spread of different nuts around the world, nuts are used in almost all cuisines known and its nutritional value make it an asset to so many diets since the ancient days.

In the beverage outlets, nuts are used in form of lacquers (Hazelnut, Almond) and liquid (coconut Milk), and as snacks served with drinks (Salted Nuts)