

ORGANIC LIVING

By
Robert Rodale

HEALTH GROWS ON TREES

What food is high in nutritive value, grows wild and free for the picking, needs little or no care while it is growing and is harvested simply by being picked up from the ground?

The answer is nuts — almonds, cashews, pecans, filberts, walnuts, chestnuts, butternuts and all the other overlooked foods in a shell. Nuts are especially appealing because they're a back-to-nature food, the sustenance of our primitive ancestors. Down through the centuries, for example, far more people have eaten acorns than wheat. Nuts were a staple food long before man ever began planting and reaping.

Unlike ordinary crops, nut trees do not depend for growth on the thin upper layer of soil, which is usually treated heavily with artificial fertilizers and doses of arsenic, DDT and other poisons. The nutritional quality of nuts is also enhanced by the deep-rooting nature of the trees. Roots of hickory, walnut and pecan often reach down 15 feet or more into the mineral-rich subsoil for nourishment.

Nuts gathered from wild trees in the autumn have a double advantage. They're often free for the taking, and they've never been sprayed. But even commercially-grown nuts that have been treated with pesticides don't absorb them the way ordinary fruit does. Nuts are providently protected from contamination by their shells.

Nuts are a concentrated energy source. In fact, they are so rich in calories that they should be eaten in moderation, especially by weight-watchers. Pound for pound, they far exceed the caloric power of bread, meat or fruit. But the calories are far from empty; nuts are bursting with nutrients.

Nuts are THE protein favorite of vegetarians. Most nuts contain about 10 to 25 per cent protein, and cashews, in particular, are a protein powerhouse. Vitamins A, E, thiamin, riboflavin, unsaturated oils and minerals like magnesium, phosphorus and iron are also supplied by nuts.

Pecans are an especially good source of vitamin B6, a nutrient that is in short supply in many processed foods. English walnuts are reported to be one of the richest natural sources of vitamin C.

Nuts are also ideal for home storage because they stay fresh months when kept properly. They were designed by nature to keep for a long time — a rich kernel in a tight shell that would preserve the seed of a tree from one year to the next.

Shelled nuts should be stored in a refrigerator or freezer. Because of their high fat content, they tend to become rancid if kept too long at room temperature.

Many people eat nuts the wrong way — fried and salted, or in candy bars. For best nutrition, you should serve them raw and unsalted. Keep a bowl of mixed, unshelled nuts and a nutcracker on hand for healthful snacking.

You can also add whole or sliced nuts to various dishes, including rice, salads, fish and chicken. Many natural food cookbooks contain recipes for nut milk, a surprisingly different food you can make from almost any kind of nut. All you need is a blender, water and a strainer.

To make cashew milk, for instance, just add one cup of cashew nuts to four cups of water in a blender container, add honey to taste and blend at high speed for two minutes. Nut milks can add nutrients and exotic flavor to many beverages and desserts.

The following recipe from The Rodale Press Cookbook



uses ground nuts instead of flour to make a delicious dessert:

WALNUT TORTE

- 6 egg yolks
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/2 cup skim milk powder
- 1/2 cup wheat germ
- 2 cups walnuts (ground fine in electric blender, 1/2 cup at a time)
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 6 egg whites

Prepare two 9-inch layer cake pans by oiling bottoms with pastry brush. Cut two circles from heavy brown paper or parchment paper. Place the paper on bottom of each pan and brush the paper thoroughly with oil.

Beat egg yolks until thick and lemon-colored. Gradually blend honey into the egg mixture. Stir in the skim milk powder, wheat germ and ground walnuts; blend together. Add vanilla extract.

Beat egg whites until stiff. Using an over and under motion, gently fold egg holk mixture into beaten egg whites until well combined. Pour batter into the prepared pans, spreading evenly to edges. Bake in preheated oven for 30 minutes at 325 degrees F.

Remove from oven and loosen sides with a spatula to ease cake out of pan. Invert on wire rack and remove paper immediately. Allow to cool completely before adding filling or fruit topping. Yields 10-12 servings.

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(Editor's note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming staff.)

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