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# Flavorful Nuts

Nuts are crunchy, versatile, flavorful and loaded with nutrition. Nuts are high in protein and fiber, cholesterol-free and contain negligible amounts of sodium unless salted. Some nuts are rich in calcium, iron, magnesium, copper, zinc, potassium and/or phosphorus. While nuts are unquestionably high in fat (45 percent of calories from fat in cashews to over 75 percent in macadamias), the fat is almost entirely monounsaturated — the kind that clinical studies demonstrate can bring down LDL-cholesterol in the blood, without affecting the level of HDL-cholesterol. In 2003, the FDA announced, “Scientific evidence suggests, but does not prove that eating 1½ ounces per day of most nuts, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease.”

## Almonds

The world’s most popular nut is thought to have originated in China. Today, 70 percent of the fruit of the almond tree is grown in California, with the remainder of the almonds grown in the Mediterranean, Australia and South Africa. Sweet and bitter almonds are the two main types. *Sweet almonds* have a delicate, sweet flavor. Raw, strongly flavored *bitter almonds* contain traces of prussic acid which can be deadly when consumed. The acid’s toxicity is destroyed when the nuts are heated, but the sale of bitter almonds is illegal in the United States. Almonds are available a variety of ways.

*To blanch almonds:* Cover nuts with cold water and bring shelled almonds to a boil. Drain and when cool enough to handle, slip the skins from the almonds by pressing them between your thumb and fingers. Toasting almonds intensifies their flavor and adds crunch.

## Brazil Nuts

Brazil nuts come from the seed of a giant tree that grows only in South America’s Amazon jungle. The seeds come in clusters of up to 24 inside a hard pod that resembles a coconut. The extremely hard shell of the nut is dark brown and triangular in shape.

*To shell Brazil nuts:* Cover the nuts with cold water and bring to a boil for 3 minutes. Drain and cover with cold water and wait 1 minute. Drain and crack.

### Toast for Flavor

Spread whole, chopped, or sliced nuts in a thin layer in a shallow baking pan. Bake for 5 to 10 minutes in a 350 degrees F oven or until light golden brown, stirring frequently to prevent scorching. Sliced and chopped nuts brown faster than whole nuts and will continue to brown even after taking out of the oven.

## **Cashews**

Cashews originated in the Amazon, but were successfully transplanted to India in the 16th century. This kidney-shaped nut grows out from the bottom of the cashew apple. Cashew shells contain highly toxic oil, which is used in paint, varnish and rocket lubricants. Today, India, Mozambique and Brazil are the leading producers of cashews, all of which are sold without the shell. Cashew nuts have a sweet, buttery flavor.

## **Hazelnuts or Filberts**

Hazelnuts grow in clusters on the hazel tree. Italy, Spain, France and Turkey lead the way in hazelnut production. Ninety-nine percent of the hazelnuts grown in the United States come from Oregon. Also called filberts and cobnuts, they are sweet, grape-sized nuts. They are used in many sweet products, but can also add flavor and texture to savory items such as salads and main dishes. Hazelnuts have a bitter brown skin that is best removed, usually by heating them at 350 degrees F for 10 to 15 minutes, until the skins begin to crumble. Most of the skin can be removed by placing a handful of nuts in a dish towel, then folding the towel over the warm nuts and rubbing vigorously.

## **Macadamia Nuts**

Originating in Australia, macadamia nuts were once used only for decorative purposes. Today, the main production of the edible nut occurs in Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand. The macadamia nuts have a fleshy husk which protects the edible seed in the middle. Macadamias are mainly sold in the shelled form and can also be purchased salted, unsalted, chocolate covered or roasted. A popular way to incorporate macadamia nuts in food is the macadamia nut cookie, but they are also good as a snack.

## **Peanuts**

The peanut definitely wins the popularity contest among nuts. While originating in Brazil and Peru, the peanut was actually brought to the United States from Africa, by the Portuguese. Today, the southeastern states are the main producers of the peanut. This nut differs from many others because it does not grow on trees. It is classified as a legume and is a great source of fiber. Around 2.4 billion pounds of peanuts and peanut products are consumed by Americans each year. Peanuts are found in everything from peanut butter to candy bars to cracker jacks. This source of protein is popular among vegetarians as a meat substitute.

## **Pecans**

Pecans are native to America and are widely grown in Georgia, Oklahoma, Texas and as far north as Virginia. Australia, Canada, India, Israel and Africa also produce pecans. The shell of the pecan is smooth and hard, but thin. Chopped or halved shelled pecans are available year-round in cellophane packages, cans and jars. Unshelled pecans are also available throughout the year, but peak season is during the autumn months. Unshelled pecans should have clean, unblemished and uncracked shells. The kernel should not rattle when the shell is shaken. Pecans can be eaten out of hand or used in a variety of sweet and savory dishes.

## Pine Nuts

Pine nuts are also referred to as the Indian nut, pinon, pignoli or pignolia. They are produced by many different species of pine trees, two each at the base of each segment in the pine cone. The pine cone must be heated to facilitate the removal of the nuts, so this labor-intensive process is what makes these nuts so expensive. Italy, Spain, Portugal and Turkey are the principal exporter of pine nuts but they are also grown in China, Mexico, North Africa and the southwest United States. There are two main varieties. Both have a thin shell with an ivory-colored nutmeat that averages ½-inch in length. The stone pine yields the *Mediterranean or Italian pine nut*. The torpedo-shaped nut has a light, delicate flavor and is the more expensive of the two. The stronger-flavored *Chinese pine nut* is shaped like a squat triangle and can easily overpower some foods in flavor. Pine nuts can be added to a variety of foods and is used for making pesto.

## Pistachio

A native of central Asia, the pistachio has been around for at least 3,000 years. Today the nuts are grown in California, Italy, Turkey, Greece and Iran. The pistachio has a hard, tan shell that surrounds a pale-green nut. Some shells are colored red with vegetable dye, while others are blanched until white. Pistachio nuts are available year-round shelled and unshelled, either raw or roasted. Buy only unshelled pistachios where the shells are partially open, as a closed shell means the nutmeat is immature.



## Soy Nuts

Soy products became very popular in 1999, when the FDA approved health claims that soy protein could help lower the risk of heart disease, with consumption of at least 25 grams of soy protein daily. One of the hot items is soy nuts. A soy nut is made by roasting dried soybeans. They make a great snack or can be used in salads and baked goods. Soy nuts are lower in calories than other nuts.



## Walnuts

The fruit of the walnut tree is documented as far back as 7,000 B.C. and may have originated in Persia. The *Black walnut* is an American species native to Appalachia. The *English or Persian walnut* is now grown in California, France and Italy. It is preferred by producers because they are easier to shell. Choose walnuts in the shell that are free of cracks or holes. Shelled walnuts should be plump, meaty and crisp. Walnuts are delicious in a variety of sweet and savory dishes and baked goods.

## Nut Allergies

While nuts are a great nutrient-dense food, they can be a huge concern to those with nut allergies. Some common allergic symptoms include hives, itchy eyes, asthma, sneezing, swelling, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea. Some reactions are severe and may lead to death. Many nut allergies are detected at a young age. Due to the increasing number of individuals with nut allergies, products containing nuts or produced near nuts must be labeled.

## Nine Nutty Ways to Liven Up Your Food!

- 1 Sprinkle nuts over cereal or yogurt for breakfast.
- 2 Add nuts to a soft cheese to make a tasty spread for crackers or bread.
- 3 Mix nuts with popcorn or trail mix to make a great to-go snack.
- 4 Garnish a bowl of soup with nuts to add texture and color.
- 5 Add sliced or chopped nuts to any salad to add flavor and crunch.
- 6 Use nuts and seasonings to coat meat, poultry or fish before baking.
- 7 Revive a leftover pasta dish by sprinkling nuts on top of the sauce.
- 8 Accent any stir-fry with toasted nuts to develop a tastier combination.
- 9 Use nuts in desserts such as brownies and cookies for an added crunch.



## Storing Nuts

Heat, light, and moisture cause nuts, especially shelled nuts, to go rancid quickly. You should store whole nuts in the shell, in a cool, dry place for six months, or indefinitely in the freezer. Store shelled nuts in the refrigerator for up to a month or in the freezer for up to six months. Toasted nuts will store in the freezer for up to a month. Nuts should always be stored in tightly-covered containers.

## Nutrition Information

Nut	Serving Size (one ounce)	Calories	Protein (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Fat (g)
Almond	20 to 24	167	5	7	15
Brazil Nut	6 to 8	186	4	4	19
Cashew	16 to 18	163	4	9	13
Hazelnut	18 to 20	179	4	4	18
Macadamia	10 to 12	200	2	4	22
Peanut	35 to 40	166	7	6	14
Pecan	18 to 20 halves	190	2	5	19
Pine Nut	150 to 157	146	7	4	17
Pistachio	47 to 49	164	6	7	14
Soy Nut	¼ cup	130	11	9	5
Walnut	8 to 11 halves	182	4	5	18

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Sandra Bastin, PhD, RD, LD, CCE  
Extension Specialist for Food and Nutrition  
Sarah Small  
Project Associate

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