

Eastern Black Walnut: From Harvest to Table

Eastern Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) trees produce a very delicious nut enjoyed by many people. Black walnuts taste different than more common English walnuts with their unique sharp and sour-sweet flavour. Black walnuts are also much more aromatic. They are considered a delicacy and can be found in much of Eastern North America, readily available at retail and online stores.

Immediately after harvesting, black walnuts should be de-husked and left to dry in a cool, well-ventilated place away from direct sunlight for up to 2 - 3 weeks. You can lay them out on a layer of newspaper or a wire screen to dry. Some people have also managed to dry walnuts by placing them in an onion sack or other material that allows for air circulation, and leaving them in 35 - 40 degree Celsius heat for 3 - 4 days. Drying black walnuts is crucial to avoid spoilage.



Black Walnuts in Shells¹



Inertia Nutcracker²

Once the walnuts are dry, it becomes time to remove their hard shells. Black walnuts are very difficult to crack. One way to do it is to lightly tap on the nut's suture line with a hammer. Another way is to use an inertia-type cracker if you have access to one, where you should place the nut so that the striker hits its pointed end. Others prefer to use a vice. The drier the nut, the easier the meat is to remove. Some people also suggest soaking black walnuts in hot water for 24 hours before cracking to make

the shells more flexible and less prone to shattering. To remove the nut meat from the cracked shells, try using a nut pick. One challenge is attempting to get the nut meat out in large pieces if so desired.

Once the shells have been removed, black walnuts are best stored in the refrigerator or freezer if not used right away. The nut meat will keep for a very long time when properly stored in the freezer, but will only last for a short period in the fridge. If the nuts are stored improperly the oils in the walnut kernels will turn rancid, so proper care must always be taken.

Black walnuts are great sources of protein and many essential minerals including iron and calcium, while remaining low in carbohydrates. A ¼ cup serving yields about 190 calories with a caloric distribution of 80% (mostly healthy) fats, 6% carbohydrates and 14% protein. They are also a good source of dietary fiber and omega-3 fatty acids.

WHAT NEXT?

Black walnuts are a wonderful addition to many recipes. Walnuts are enjoyed whole or crushed, raw or roasted, in desserts, salads and snacks. Harvesting, de-husking, cleaning and cracking black walnuts requires a lot of time and patience, but is definitely worth the effort. Whether you bake them in brownies or cakes, add them to cereal, or simply eat them by the handful, black walnuts are delicious!



Cracked Black Walnut³

- *Hidden Harvest Ottawa, ottawa.hiddenharvest.ca*

Favourite Black Walnut Cookies^a

Makes 24 cookies

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened (or vegan margarine)
- 1 cup white or cane sugar
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs (or 2 small bananas, or ½ cup applesauce)
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup black walnuts, chopped

Directions:

1. In a large bowl, cream butter, white sugar and brown sugar. Add eggs and beat until smooth.
2. Sift together flour, baking soda, and salt. Stir dry ingredients into the creamed mixture until well blended. Stir in walnuts last.
3. Shape dough into logs about 2 inches in diameter, wrap them in wax paper, and refrigerate until firm.
4. Preheat oven to 350 °F (175 °C).
5. Slice dough logs into ½ inch slices, and place on baking sheet. Bake in oven for 8 - 10 min.

Strawberry, Spinach and Pear Salad^b

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- ½ cup black walnuts
- 1 (10 ounce) bag spinach leaves
- 1 (10 ounce) bag romaine lettuce, torn
- ½ cup balsamic vinaigrette
- 8 large strawberries, sliced
- 2 pears - peeled, cored and sliced
- 1 (6 ounce) container crumbled feta (optional)
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinaigrette

Directions:

1. In a small skillet, place the walnuts over medium-high heat; toast the nuts while stirring constantly for 4 to 5 minutes, then set aside to cool completely.
2. In a large mixing bowl, toss together the spinach and romaine lettuce, then toss with ½ cup of balsamic vinaigrette.
3. Arrange the strawberries, pears, feta cheese, and walnuts over the top of the salad.
4. Dress the salad with another 3 tablespoons vinaigrette to serve.

HISTORICAL TIDBITS

There are a few interesting facts about the history of black walnuts. In pre-Columbian times, black walnut trees grew very large, from Eastern America west to the Great Plains. Sadly, Europeans prized the lumber of these trees so much that most of the old growth trees were chopped down long ago. Many native groups, including the Cherokee, chewed on black walnut bark for toothaches and used it in tea as a laxative, always with caution since the bark is poisonous. The Cherokee also ate the fruit and, along with the Chippewa, used the bark to make brown and black dye. The Comanche created a paste from the leaves and husk to treat ringworm, and others discovered how to use the tree as an insecticide, and to treat athlete's foot and hemorrhoids. The black walnut is related to the pecan and hickory.

References:

Crowell, Amy. "Eat Wild - Black Walnuts". *edible Austin*. www.edibleaustin.com/content/editorial/editorial/678.
ECSONG. "A Nut Grower's Manual". www.songonline.ca/ecsong/manual/species.html#A.
Everhart, Eldon. "Harvesting, Cracking, and Storing Black Walnuts". *Horticulture & Home Pest News*. www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1994/9-16-1994/bnut.html. Sept. 16, 1994.
GardenGuides.com. "Black Walnut (Nigra)". www.gardenguides.com/taxonomy/black-walnut-juglans-nigra/
Lalevich, Steven. "Nutritional Content of Black Walnuts". *LiveStrong.com*. www.livestrong.com/article/294340-nutritional-content-of-black-walnuts/. Nov. 2, 2010.
McCloskey, Eoghan. "When Are Walnuts Ready to Pick?". www.ehow.com/info_8272385_walnuts-ready-pick.html
Richins Myers, Vanessa. "Black Walnut – Juglans Nigra". *About.com treesandshrubs.about.com/od/commontrees/p/blackwalnut.htm*.
Sweeney, Sue. "The Monday Garden". *Ontario Trees & Shrubs*. ontariotrees.com/mondaygarden/article.php?id=0149. Jan. 30, 2005.
wikiHow. "How to Harvest Black Walnuts". www.wikihow.com/Harvest-Black-Walnuts.

Image Sources:

1. www.achefshelp.com/category/106/walnut-world
2. shellers.pecanvalleypecans.com/
3. www.wildmanstevebrill.com/Plants.Folder/BlackWalnut.html

Recipe Sources:

- a. allrecipes.com/recipe/favorite-black-walnut-cookies/detail.aspx
- b. allrecipes.com/recipe/strawberry-spinach-and-pear-salad/detail.aspx

