

## Commodity Fact Sheet

# Walnuts

Information compiled by the California Walnut Board

**How Produced** – After an orchard is planted, it takes approximately four years until it produces its first major crop. Constant attention is given to each tree every step of the way—from pruning, spraying, and fertilizing to irrigation—to ensure a healthy orchard. Once a walnut tree has been planted and stabilized, it will continue to bear fruit for as long as a century.

Harvest begins in September when the protective outer covering, called a hull, splits, signaling that the nuts are ready to be removed from the trees. Nuts are often harvested by a mechanical shaker. After walnuts have been shaken to the ground, they are blown into a row to allow mechanical harvesters to pick them up for cleaning and hulling. The harvest season usually continues into early November.

After hulling and washing, the nuts are transferred from the mechanical harvester into a hopper where they are mechanically dehydrated (air-dried). This protects the nut during transport and storage. Mechanical dehydration is quick, thorough, and scientifically controlled—a major improvement over the sun-drying method formerly used. Walnuts with desirable traits such as big beautiful shells are selected for the in-shell market. Other walnuts are shelled and processed into walnut halves and pieces, and chopped walnuts to be sold in supermarkets across the country.

**History** – Walnuts are recognized as the oldest known tree food, dating back to 7000 B.C. In fact, walnuts are one of only a handful of trees and plants that can be found growing naturally in both eastern and western hemispheres—strong evidence that the trees existed before the continents split apart. Records indicate Persian nuts (English walnuts) were known during the reign of Tiberius. Remains of this nut have also been unearthed in ancient Rome where walnuts were considered food for the gods and called "Juglans Regia" in honor of Jupiter.

The term "English" applied to the Persian nut is a misnomer. The name "English walnut" refers to the English merchant marines whose ships transported the product for trade around the world. It is thought that the first English walnuts were brought to California by Mission Fathers around 1770. Joseph Sexton planted the first commercial walnut orchard in California in 1867, near Goleta in Santa Barbara County.

**Varieties**—In recent years, Chandler has been the most popular variety used for shelled walnuts. However, there are more than 30 varieties of commercially produced walnuts, hybrids of the English (Persian) walnut. The varieties were developed to have specific characteristics such as early or late harvest times, thin or thick shells, high percentages of walnut meat, or specific pest tolerances. Five varieties account for more than 80 percent of production: Chandler, Hartley, Tulare, Howard, and Serr.



**Commodity Value** – In California, 300,000 bearing acres, primarily from Redding to Bakersfield, produce two-thirds of the world's trade in walnuts. California's crop generates

more than \$1.9 billion in farm gate revenue. Approximately 60 percent of the crop is exported. China, Germany, Japan, Korea, Turkey, and Spain are some of the largest export markets.

Walnut shells can be burned to generate power and heat, or ground and used as pet litter and in sandblasting. In Japan, the shells are used in snow tires to aid traction. Walnut oil is used in gourmet cooking and cosmetics.

**Top Producing Counties** – San Joaquin County leads production. Other top counties include Butte, Tulare, Stanislaus, and Sutter.

**Nutritional Value** – In March 2004, the United States Food and Drug Administration affirmed that eating 1.5 ounces per day of walnuts as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease. A one-ounce handful of walnuts (12-14 halves) contains good polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs) and is an excellent source of the plant-based essential omega-3 fatty acids ALA (2.5 grams). Walnuts contain many antioxidants and are naturally cholesterol and sodium free. They also have four grams of protein and two grams of fiber per serving.

**For additional information:**

California Walnut Board  
(916) 932-7070

Website: [www.walnuts.org](http://www.walnuts.org)



# Walnut Activity Sheet

**Year 1**  
Seedling grafted to Paradox or Black Walnut rootstocks.

**Year 2**  
Orchard leveled, irrigation system installed, trees planted.

**Years 2-6**  
Trees pruned, irrigated and fertilized: weeds and insects controlled by biological chemical and/or mechanical methods; limited nut production.

**Years 7-100**  
Trees produce full crops averaging 2.01 tons/acre.

**Harvest**  
Orchard floors cleaned to remove vegetative growth.

Shaker shakes nuts from trees; walnuts swept into windrows by a sweeper, picked up by harvester and delivered to a hauler.

Large wire brushes remove remaining husks from walnuts; walnuts dried to moisture content of 8 percent.

Walnuts packaged for market or sent to processors.



## Annual Practices

**September-October**  
Early harvest begins.

**April-August**  
Fertilization, irrigation and pest management strategies implemented.

**November**  
Late harvest completed; orchard floors cleaned; pruning begins.

**December-March**  
Pruning continues; dormant sprays control mites and other insect pests.

## Lesson Ideas

- Make a list of different uses for walnuts and walnut by-products.
- Research how walnut shells are used as an abrasive in industrial applications.
- Classify different nuts based on their size, origin, nutritional value, texture, and color.
- Use walnut shells in math and art activities.
- Discuss the importance of polyunsaturated fats. Walnuts are an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are necessary because they cannot be produced by the body.
- Bring products made from walnuts or walnut by-products to class.
- California exports walnuts to more than 100 countries around the world. Find some of these countries on a world map. Use the map scale to determine the distance a walnut travels from California.

## Fantastic Facts

1. Walnuts are the oldest known tree food.
2. There is no cholesterol in walnuts, and eating walnuts helps reduce the level of cholesterol in the blood.
3. Two-thirds of the world's walnuts are produced in California.
4. A healthy walnut tree can produce crops for approximately 100 years.
5. By-products of walnuts include cosmetics, oil, sand blasting materials, snow tires, and pet litter.
6. After a walnut orchard is planted, it takes four years to produce the first crop.
7. Walnuts used for the in-shell market must have big beautiful shells.

## Lesson Plan: Walnut Shell Dye

**Introduction:** Walnuts are a delicious and healthful snack, and provide valuable by-products for a variety of purposes. Walnut shells can be burned to generate power and heat or ground up to be used as pet litter, sand paper and snow tires. Processed walnut shells can be used for dyeing fabrics and other textiles, as well as staining wood. The color of the dye will change slightly from harvest season to harvest season depending on the health of the walnut tree and nuts.

**Objective:** Students will use walnut shells to create a dye for art or woodworking projects.

**California Standards:** NGSS: 5-PS1-1, MS-PS1-2

**Materials:** Two cups of walnut shells, 1 quart water, stove or heating source, large enamel or stainless steel (not aluminum) pot, sturdy wooden spoon, sieve, container to collect dye, fabric to dye.

### Procedure:

1. Review class safety procedures before beginning this experiment.
2. In a large pot, combine two cups walnut shells and one quart water. Soak the shells in the water overnight.
3. The following day, boil the shells in the water for one hour. Be careful not to let the water evaporate completely.
4. Use the sieve to strain the mixture and discard remaining shells. Add the fabric to be colored directly into the dye. Let the material soak in the dye until the desired color intensity is reached. The dye may also be applied to hard surfaces using a paint brush.
5. Discuss the scientific concepts that explain the color change, and have students provide evidence for their reasoning. Does the dye contain walnuts? What would happen if all the water evaporated? Are they observing a chemical or physical change?

