

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Now's the season when more people use nuts than any other time of the year.

Nuts go into dressing for the turkey or crust on the chicken or fish. Nuts go into salads and salsas. And of course nuts go into so many baked goods, from classic pecan pie to breads, cakes and cookies. Some households keep a bowl of nuts and a nutcracker beside the recliner, for easy cracking and nibbling while watching football games. The down side is all those calories. But nuts add so much, flavor, texture, healthy oils, protein and minerals, with no cholesterol, that we can go ahead and enjoy them. No guilty conscience unless you eat the whole jar!

The only nut that has a significant amount of carbohydrate is the chestnut. It's more popular in Europe than here, although around the holidays you will find them available. Roasted chestnuts and chestnuts in the dressing are traditions in some families. If you've never roasted chestnuts and want to try it, be sure to cut an X in the brown outer skin. That lets the steam out as they bake. Otherwise you'll have exploding chestnuts in the oven! Chestnuts do need to be cooked, either baked, boiled or steamed before eating. Canned chestnuts have been cooked and are ready for use.

Many recipes call for toasting nuts first. It's an extra step some people just skip. But it is worth the time. Toasting or roasting nuts makes the flavor and aroma stronger. They'll make the whole house smell wonderful. Toasting also crisps the nuts so that they don't get soggy and limp as fast when they're cooked. You can spread the nuts on a baking sheet in a single layer and toast in the oven. Using a 300°F oven should take

about 15 - 20 minutes. Be sure to stir them around every couple of minutes so they don't scorch. They're done when you can smell them. Or if you're careful you can toast them in a dry skillet over medium heat, stirring constantly. Don't let them scorch!

It's easier to get the skin off peanuts, hazelnuts and pistachios after they've been toasted. Pour the warm nuts into a dry dish cloth, fold it over and rub the nuts around briskly. The skins will come flaking off.

Blanched or skinned almonds are readily available now so we don't have to go to the same bother our grandmothers did. But if you happen to have a bag of whole almonds and a recipe that calls for blanched ones, there's no need to go running to the store for more nuts. Measure the amount you need into a bowl and pour enough boiling water over to cover them. Let them soak for 15-20 seconds, or a minute if you're doing a whole lot. Drain them, pour cold water over to cool them quickly, and drain completely. You can use your hands or put them in a dry dish towel and rub them to remove the skins.

If you have a favorite nutty recipe you probably all ready know which nuts you want to use. Pecans are a great Southern tradition. They're slightly sweet so they're great in baked goods, but also blend well with fish and chicken as do most other nuts. Add a few ground, toasted nuts to the bread crumbs for baked fish or chicken fillets. The extra crunch and touch of sweetness will make an ordinary dinner seem special. A few chopped onto a salad add a crunchy balance to soft greens. Nuts are high calorie, so go easy on how many you add.

When grinding nuts in a food processor be sure to use short pulses of power. That way you'll be able to stop the grinding before you end up with nut paste or nut

butter. All the oil in nuts will make them sticky or creamy if they're over-ground. Go too far and the oil will start to separate out. Nut butters will not work the same way ground or chopped nuts will in bread or cookie recipes.

Here's a very easy pecan cookie recipe. Line cookie sheets with foil so they can be reused quickly. These cookies tend to spread out, so give them enough space on the pans. They should be crisp, so be sure to store them in airtight containers until you give them to friends and family.

Pecan Crisps

2 egg whites at room temperature

1 cup packed brown sugar

½ cup flour

2 cups pecan halves or pieces

Preheat oven to 300° F. Grease and flour cookie sheets. Beat egg whites until stiff peaks form. Gradually sprinkle sugar over whites and continue to beat until well blended. Gently fold flour and nuts into whites. Drop by teaspoonfuls 2 inches apart on prepared cookie sheets. Bake for 20 – 25 minutes. Remove to racks to cool. Makes about 4 dozen.