

IFAS Extension

Pick A Peck Of Nutritious Pecans

Tallahassee Democrat

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Is it PEE-CAN or PA-KAWN?

You can call it PEE-CAN or PA-KAWN, because no matter how you pronounce PECAN, you will still get the same thing . . . a nutritious and tasty treat popular in many southern dishes! But, to settle this argument, a 2003 national survey did find “PEE-can” to be the overwhelming choice among Americans.

Around here, they are also called Stuart, Elliott, Curtis, Gloria Grande and Sumner. Everyone has their favorite, personally, I like them all. Most of my life I have lived underneath or very close by pecan trees. I’ve also picked up and shelled quite a few nuts over the years. Now I’m watching my children pick up nuts, most to sell, some to share and store. Most locals know how to store pecans, but I still get calls wanting storage and nutrition information.

The following storage recommendations come from Brian A. Nummer, Ph.D. from the National Center for Home Food Preservation. Pecans need to be picked up off the ground as soon as possible to protect them from extra moisture and predators. Pecans will mold, so they need to be dried in the shell in thin layers on small mesh bags in a well-ventilated area at room temperature out of direct sunlight. Pecans can be dried using forced air or an electric dehydrator (100 degrees F or lower). This will speed up the process and help reduce the chance of mold problems. Oven drying is not recommended for nuts in the shell.

Pecans store well in or out of the shell. Due to their high oil content, they are perishable and need to be stored properly to maintain good quality. At home, unshelled pecans should be stored in a cool, dry place. Shelled pecans keep best when refrigerated or frozen. They absorb odors easily, so they are best stored in vacuum-sealed bags or jars. Zipper lock bags or airtight containers will also work. Press out all of the air possible when using flexible packaging. Frozen pecans can be thawed and refrozen repeatedly during the two-year freezing period without loss of flavor or texture. The storage chart below is based on research work of Dr. J.G. Woodroof and E.K. Keaton at the Georgia Experiment Station for The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

Approximate Storage Times of Pecans

	Pantry 70°-80° degrees F	Refrigerator 38°-40° degrees F	Freezer 0° degrees F
Pecan Halves	2 months	9 months	2 years
Pecan Pieces	1 month	5 months	1 year
Unshelled Pecans	4 months	18 months	2-4 years

Nuts are recommended by the American Heart Association and U.S. Dietary guidelines as a desirable source of heart-healthy unsaturated fat. Pecans are cholesterol free and sodium free. 90% of the fats in pecans are unsaturated (about 60% monounsaturated - 30% polyunsaturated). Pecans are a fiber-rich plant protein source. They have more than 19 vitamins and minerals including an important type of vitamin E. Pecans also contain a variety of phytochemicals which are so important for protecting your body from some cancers and heart disease.

How many pecans should you eat per day? The U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend the average adult (depending on sex, age and size) consume 5-7 teaspoons of healthy oils per day. One ounce of nut meat is equal to 3 teaspoons of oil. There are approximately 19 pecan halves in one ounce of nut meat. Pecans can also be substituted for meat. The U.S. Dietary guidelines recommend the average adult (depending on sex, age and size) consume 5-6 ounces of meat per day. One ounce of meat is equal to 1/2 ounce of nuts or about 9-10 pecan halves.

Pecans are great eating out of hand, sprinkled on casseroles, vegetables, fruit, meats, breads and desserts. Pecans are an asset to most foods. To toast pecans, spread them on a baking sheet in an oven and heat for 15 to 20 minutes at 350° degrees F, or 45-60 minutes at 200° degrees F. Watch carefully to prevent overcooking. They don't need to brown in the oven, because they will darken some as they cool. You can also coat with a small amount of margarine and salt after toasting, just remember this adds calories and sodium.

PEE-CAN or PA-KAWN . . . call it whatever you want, just be sure to take advantage of the new PECAN crop to enjoy all year long!

If you have a question, write to Rebecca Moore, County Extension Agent , Family and Consumer Science, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service - Thomas County, P.O. Box 49, Thomasville, GA 31799; call the Extension Office (229) 225-4130, between 8a.m. to 5p.m. weekdays or email rebmoore@uga.edu.

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