



Angela Treadaway
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Home Preservation of Pecans

The pecan is a member of the Hickory family and is native to the Mississippi River valley. It grows in much of the southern half of the U.S. providing a beautiful shade tree with the bonus of fall fruit. Although pecans are typically associated with the holidays or fancy candy dishes, there's no need to wait until the holidays to savor the crunchy texture and satisfying flavor of pecans. Pecans are packed with so much nutrition; they should be enjoyed all year long!

Harvesting and Shelling

Pecans are typically harvested in October through December. Pecans are mature and ready to harvest anytime after the shuck begins to open. It is easier to wait and harvest nuts by shaking or thrashing branches after shucks are wide open and partially dried. However, the longer you wait the more pecans that may be lost to predators. Nuts harvested early in the season have high moisture content and need to be dried before storage. Pecans harvested early can contain 25-30% moisture. Water content decreases in pecans harvested later in the season. Pecans should be stored at a moisture content of about 4%. Dry them in the shell in thin layers on elevated screens or hang them in small mesh bags in a well-ventilated area at room temperature out of direct sunlight. Within 2 weeks the nut meats should be dry enough to snap when bent, an indication they are ready for storage or immediate use.

Storage

Pecans are perishable because of their high oil content and they must be stored properly to maintain good quality. At home, unshelled pecans can be stored in a cool, dry place. Shelled pecans should be either refrigerated or frozen. (Source: Georgia Pecan Commission).

Refrigerating or Freezing

Pecan nuts must be stored away from air and light. Pecans will also readily absorb odors from almost any material, including other fruits and vegetables. The best storage conditions can be obtained using vacuum-sealed bags or jars. In the absence of a vacuum sealer, zipper lock bags or airtight containers will work. For flexible packaging be sure and press out all of the air possible before storage. Place sealed bags or vacuum packages in the refrigerator or freezer. When frozen pecans can be thawed and refrozen repeatedly during the two-year freezing period without loss of flavor or texture. (Source: Texas Pecan Growers Association).

Approximate storage times of pecans

Pantry: 70-80 degrees F—pecans can only be stored for 2 months

Refrigerator: 38-40 degrees F—pecans can be stored 9 months
Freezer: 0 degrees F—pecans can be stored 1-2 years
Unshelled pecans can be kept in the freezer for up to 4 years

Canning nut meats: Hot Pack (dry)

Shell nuts. Spread a single layer of nut meats on baking pans and place in a 250°F oven. Stir occasionally heating only until the nut meats are dry but not browned. Watch carefully that they don't scorch. Pack hot nuts into hot, clean jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Do not add any liquid to the jars. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids and process.

Option 1 – Process in a Boiling Water Canner *with the water in the canner 1 to 2 inches below the tops of the jars*: Hot Half-Pints or Pints **30 min**

Option 2 – Process in a Dial Gauge Pressure Canner OR in a Weighted Gauge Canner: Hot Half-Pints or Pints **10 min at 10 lbs**

(Source: University of Georgia, *So Easy to Preserve*, 4th ed. 1999)

Frequently Asked Questions about Pecans:

How do I toast pecans?

To toast pecans spread them on a baking sheet in an oven and heat for 15 to 20 minutes at 350 degrees F. (Source: USDA. Nuts in family meals. 1971).

Are moldy pecans safe to eat?

No. Throw them out. Some people might take a risk and eat moldy foods. In many instances, the individual will simply not feel well after eating moldy food. However, molds on nuts (and grain products) could be a significant hazard. The molds that can grow on nuts can produce mycotoxins. Mycotoxins are highly poisonous compounds produced by molds or fungi. If one sees mold growth, there is the possibility of mycotoxins being present. Molds love moist conditions. Therefore, it is important to keep dry foods dry, particularly nuts and grain products, to prevent mold growth.

How can I tell if my pecans are rancid?

Rancid nuts have a bitter, unpleasant oily taste. Rancid pecans may also have a dark color. A rancid nut can ruin an otherwise perfectly prepared dish, so always taste several nuts from the batch before you use them. Rancidity cannot be reversed. Discard any affected pecans.

For more information on this and other food safety questions you might have please contact Angela Treadaway, Regional Extension Agent in Food Safety/Preservation/Preparation at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or (205) 410-3696—cell.