



By Peggy Crum, MA, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

Something about the holidays makes me feel like a nut. Maybe it's the bowl with the nutcracker affixed in the center, filled with a mix of nuts to leisurely crack and eat. Perhaps it's the traditional holiday dishes with toppings or fillings or crusts made of nuts. Pecans with their distinctive, buttery-richness and soft-crunchy texture are, in my humble opinion, the perfect holiday nut.

Pecan trees are the only nut-bearing tree native to North America. Pecans have one of the highest oil contents of any nut making them nutritious and delicious but also more fragile and prone to spoilage.

In-shell pecans keep for a long time. The shell protects the nut meats from the air so just store them in a cool, dry place. Because they store so well, pecans are available year-round. In shell pecans may be kept for over a year if stored in the freezer. One pound of in-shell pecans yields about 9 ounces of pecan meats.

Shelled pecans are golden brown on the outside and light tan on the inside. When shopping, choose pecans that are plump, not thin and shriveled. Unless you have plans to use them right away, store them in the freezer sealed in an airtight container or freezer bag. Freezing the nut meats not only stabilizes the natural oils, it reduces the chance of insect damage. Because of their low moisture content, pecans can be thawed and refrozen repeatedly without losing quality. Carefully handled, raw pecans can be stored for years in the freezer.

Unless the package says otherwise, shelled pecans are raw and are available as halves, pieces, chopped, and meal. Roasting in a slow oven for 5 to 7 minutes enhances flavor without adding anything else. Roasting also exposes the nut oils to air making roasted pecans more prone to spoilage. If you happen to have roasted nuts left after a week or two, store them in the freezer to enjoy later.

RECIPE for health

DECEMBER 2014

featured food:

PECANS

Pecan & Dark Chocolate Chip Cookies

Recipe developed by Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski and featured in Residential Dining Services. Makes 2 dozen.

- 1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 Tbsp. corn syrup
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 t. kosher salt
- 1 1/4 cups bread flour
- 1 1/4 cups pastry flour (or use 5/8 cup cake flour + 5/8 cup all-purpose flour)
- 2 cups dark chocolate chips
- 1 cup pecan pieces, lightly roasted

In a stand mixer beat the butter, brown sugar, sugar and corn syrup until creamy. Continue to beat while adding the eggs, one at a time, and the vanilla.

While that is mixing, sift the flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt together. Add the dry ingredients to butter-sugar mixture. Mix until dough forms. Remove bowl from the mixer; use a firm spatula to mix in the chocolate chips and pecans.

Spoon the dough by rounded tablespoons onto parchment or silicon lined baking sheets and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. DO NOT bake the cookies from room temperature.

Preheat oven to 375 ° F.

Remove from the refrigerator and bake for about 12 minutes or until they are just barely golden on the edges. Remove and let cool on baking sheets before removing to wire rack.

Try **Pecan Cookies** with lunch at Brody Square on December 3.

- Join us in person at Brody Square Demo Kitchen. Sign-up at health4u@msu.edu.
- Watch online: alumni.msu.edu/livestream.