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Release Date: December 4, 2017

## Pecans Date Back to 16<sup>th</sup> Century

Buttery, crunchy, plus full of flavor and healthy fats, so many reasons to go nuts over pecans. Dating back to the 16th century, pecans are the only tree nut native to North America. The name “pecan” comes from the Native American term used to explain “nuts requiring a stone to crack.”

Wide-scale propagation of this nut began in the late 1880s and today 80 percent of the world’s crop is grown in southern states like Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana and Georgia.

Pecans meet the American Heart Association's nutritional guidelines for a heart-healthy diet. A one-ounce serving (15- 20 pecan halves) delivers a blast of anti-oxidants that are good for your heart and taste that’s good for your soul. One ounce of pecans (about 19 pieces) has 195 calories, 3 grams of fiber and both heart-healthy mono and polyunsaturated fats. Pecans also contain minerals like zinc, magnesium, copper, iron and selenium.

When choosing pecans for your holiday baking, choose quality. Purchasing pecans in the shell is the most economical. Choose pecans that are clean and free of splits, cracks, stains, or holes. They should feel heavy for their size.

If price is not a concern, or pecans need to be already shelled, look for plump nutmeats which are uniform in color and size. The best nutmeats have a golden-brown color.

Purchasing shelled pecan halves in small amounts for garnishes while pecan pieces will suit most baking needs and are considerably cheaper than halves. Purchase pecans in quantity when prices are low and can be stored for future use.

Pecans are long lasting, and when stored properly, they will hold their freshness for up to two years. The secret of storing pecan meat at home is to pack them dry, protect them from insects, guard against odor absorption from other foods, and keep cool. Some acceptable containers include: glass jars and lids with plastic gaskets; zipper type freezer bags with air removed; or plastic containers with tight fitting lids.

Shelled nuts will keep fresh in a cool, dry place for about 6 months and even longer in the freezer. Freeze in tightly closed freezer containers and store at zero degrees or lower.

Unshelled pecans resist insects and aging much longer than shelled nuts; however, shelling before storage reduces bulk by approximately one-half. Shelled or unshelled pecans may be kept refrigerated in airtight containers for about nine months.

When purchasing pecans, remember that a pound of in-shell pecans will yield approximately 2 and one fourth cups of nutmeat. Twelve pecan halves will yield 3 tablespoons of chopped nutmeat. A good rule of thumb is, to get a pound of nutmeat; you will need two and one-half pounds of good quality pecans.

Once you have your new crop pecans, you will want to make these Sugar Spiced Pecans.

#### Sugar Spiced Pecans

1 lb. pecan halves  
1 c. sugar

¾ teaspoon salt

1 ¾ teaspoon cinnamon

1 c. water

1 t. vanilla

Toast pecans on baking sheet for 10 minutes at 300°F. Combine all ingredients, except pecans and vanilla, in small pan. Cook about 5 minutes (until syrup spins a small thread). Remove from heat and add pecans and vanilla. Stir quickly until syrup crystallizes. Pour onto buttered platter. Separate nuts rapidly (but gently) and cool before serving. *Recipe Courtesy: Georgia Pecan Commission*

Tried and True Tip: Avoid storing pecans near foods which omit strong odors, such as onions, apples, or oranges.

If you would like more information on baking or for additional food and nutrition questions or any other topic related to Family and Consumer Science, contact Holly Jay at MSU Extension Office, Big Horn County, 406-665-9770 or stop by 317 N. Custer Ave. in Hardin. Article Adapted with permission from Carla Hadley University of Arkansas Extension.

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