

PRAISEWORTHY PECANS

Pecans are a tree nut from the hickory species. A culinary staple, the pecan adds a unique flavor to sweet and savory foods. Among the most versatile ingredient to accompany healthy dishes is the pecan. Pecans lend both a nutty flavor and tasty crunch to a wide variety of recipes.

Raw pecans are cholesterol-free, sodium-free, and low in carbohydrates. The nut is a nutrition powerhouse loaded with vitamins and minerals. It is also bursting with healthy fats, fiber, and protein. One ounce or about 19 halves is about 200 calories.

Pecans are known for a buttery texture and unmistakable, slightly sweet flavor. Pecans are delicious raw, but the flavor is even more pronounced after toasting for a few minutes. To toast, preheat the oven to 350°F and spread pecans on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake for 7 to 10 minutes, or until fragrant and slightly deeper in color.

Knowing measurement equivalents will make using this tasty nut in recipes a cinch. One pound of pecans in their shells is 3 cups shelled. One pound shelled pecans equals 4 cups and 1 cup of pecan halves equals 3/4 cup chopped.

When still in their shell, pecans can be stored for 6 to 12 months if in a cool, dry place. Once opened, a bag of shelled nuts needs to be carefully re-sealed or put in a container that is airtight. Pecans will keep their freshness for several weeks in the refrigerator or up to one year in the freezer.

Pecans are filled with great nutritional benefits. Consider these ways of adding them to your diet:

- Start your day with pecan granola bars for a convenient breakfast.
- Quickbreads loaded with pecans make a delicious snack.
- Dried fruit nut oatmeal is an easy, hot breakfast.
- Baked French toast with pecan topping is a crowd-pleaser.
- Spread pecan butter onto toast, bagel, or an English muffin.
- Dip into a creamy pecan cheese ball with a nutty exterior for extra crunch and flavor.
- Serve a dip with crunchy pecans.
- Pecan blue cheese-filled dates are an easy appetizer.
- Blend pecan oil with red wine vinegar, garlic, and a little salt and pepper for an easy salad dressing with a mild nuttiness.
- Make a winter cabbage salad with apples and spiced pecans.
- A cream cheese dressing over grapes topped with a brown sugar pecan topping is impressive.
- Stuff squash with a pecan filling.
- Toss green beans with caramelized pecans for an elegant side dish.
- Make a side dish of bacon Brussels sprouts with candied pecans.
- Sprinkle toasted butter pecans on soup for a bite of crunch.
- For a standout dinner, begin by simmering chops in apple juice, then drizzle with sweet maple syrup, and top with crunchy pecans.

- Pecan-crusting fish or chicken makes a flavorful dish.
- Quinoa and pecan stuffed bell peppers are a quick weeknight dinner.
- Make a sandwich with pecan chicken salad.
- Serve grilled fruit topped with yogurt and toasted pecans for a quick dessert.
- Are you looking for a sweet ending to a special meal? An attractive pecan pie is bound to please with its traditional filling and honey-glazed pecans.
- Who doesn't love sticky buns or caramel rolls made with caramel and pecans?
- Toasted pecans add a nutty crunch to creamy fudge, perfect for holiday giving. Try a butter pecan fudge recipe.
- Turtle cheesecake is a fabulous dessert.
- Salted pecan shortbread squares are the ultimate go-to for cookie trays and gift-giving. It is tough to eat just one.
- Candied and savory spiced pecans make a great gift all year long.
- Butterscotch pecan bread pudding is an irresistible dessert.
- Coconut pecan truffles only take minutes to prepare.
- Try a summer favorite – salted caramel butter pecan ice cream.

Pecans are a wonderful ingredient that can enhance almost any recipe. When you're ready to get cooking, embrace pecans in both sweet and savory ways!