

Introduction

The Industry Takes Root

The first commercial plantings began in 1867 when Joseph Sexton, an orchardist and nurseryman in the Santa Barbara County town of Goleta, planted English walnuts. Soon, walnuts were planted in many areas of southern California and accounted for 65 per cent of all bearing acreage.

Some 70 years later, the centre of California's walnut production moved northward in one of the most dramatic horticultural moves in history. Better growing areas, coupled with improvements in irrigation and pest control methods, resulted in greater yields, which gradually increased each year.

The Central Valley of California is now the state's prime walnut growing region. Its mild climate and deep fertile soils provide ideal growing conditions for the California Walnut, which accounts for 99 per cent of the commercial U.S. supply and two-thirds of world supply of walnuts.

Information referenced from: www.globalgourmet.com

Growing The Perfect Walnut

Walnuts are commercially grown on more than 200,000 acres of land throughout the Central Valley of California and in the Coastal Valleys.

The journey from planting to the perfect California Walnut takes a lot of patience... approximately six to eight years until the first harvest. During that time, constant attention is given to each tree – from pruning and spraying to fertilizing and irrigation. The investment is valuable because once a walnut tree has been planted and stabilized, it will continue to bear fine quality fruit for up to 100 years.

In late August, boughs of California Walnut trees hang heavy with walnuts covered in thick green hulls. The harvest begins when the protective green hulls split, signalling that the nuts are ready to be removed from the trees, and it continues into early November. Harvesting operations are largely automated. First, the orchard floor is dragged clean of twigs, rocks and other orchard debris. Then the nuts are knocked to the ground by a mechanical shaker, blown into rows and picked up by mechanical harvesters for cleaning and hulling.

All Dried Out

After hulling and washing, the nuts are transferred from the mechanical harvester into a hopper where they are air-dried to the desirable eight-per-cent moisture level. This prevents deterioration of the nut and protects its quality during storage. Mechanical dehydration represents a major improvement over the sun-drying method formerly used.

Where Do We Go From Here?

From the orchards, hulled walnuts are trucked to nearby packing plants. From there, the California Walnut may enter the market in a number of different ways.

In-shell

Walnuts with big beautiful shells are selected for the in-shell market where holiday cracking of walnuts is an age-old tradition.

Shelled

Clean, dried walnuts are stored until state-of-the-art equipment is used to remove the shells. Only top quality walnuts enter the processing channels, and all aspects of California Walnut processing exceed the world's highest food processing sanitation and quality control standards.

- Walnuts for both consumer and industrial use are removed from storage as needed and sent to a shelling department where they are cracked mechanically.
- Next, the shelled walnuts are screened, kernels are separated into a series of sizes and shell fragments are removed.

- Finally, walnuts are hand sorted by trained inspectors for quality, and are ready for packaging in clear film bags or bulk cartons.

A Quality Nut

All walnuts must meet or exceed the standards set by the Walnut Marketing Board and enforced by the Dried Fruit and Tree Nut Association of California (DFA). This ensures that California Walnuts are truly the world's finest.

Packing

California Walnuts are produced in a wide range of sizes and colour grades to meet the specifications of walnut buyers from around the world.

As a rule, walnuts are available to the food industry in 25 lb corrugated cartons while smaller walnuts are usually available in 30 lb boxes. Suppliers also ship 1,000 lb and 2,000 lb containers and other industrial sizes.

Storage

Shelled walnuts should be kept in an odour-free environment, away from excessive heat, moisture, light and air to ensure maximum shelf life. To maintain optimum freshness, shelled walnut kernels should be kept in refrigerated storage at 32°F to 38°F and at 55 to 65 per cent relative humidity.