

Harvest and Store Pecans Properly

The 2008 Georgia pecan harvest is estimated to be 50 million pounds. That sounds like an awful lot of pecan pies, but in 1978, Georgia produced 135 million pounds. Georgia still leads the nation in pecan production. The 2008 crop is about half the normal harvest. Georgia commercial pecan production occurs in South Georgia, but our back yard and small orchard trees in the northern counties are important to us.

Our locally grown pecan crop will mean more if we don't waste any time getting it harvested and stored properly.

One of the most important things is to harvest early. As soon as the nuts can be shaken out of the husks, it's time to harvest them. If the nuts are allowed to lie on the ground for a long time, they tend to deteriorate, especially if they're high in moisture. I have seen a few pecans here at the office that contained too much water so I'm sure we have some that rotted before they completely filled out. Like tomatoes that crack open from rain after a dry spell, pecans too can crack absorbing too much moisture.

Pick up good, clean nuts and if they are high in moisture, spread them on newspapers or in a garage and put a fan on them to enable air movement to help dry the pecans.

It's critical to get the initial moisture out of the pecans and get them down to a 5 percent or 6 percent moisture, so they can be stored properly. Wet pecans will tend to mold and this can be avoided by a proper drying technique. After the pecans have been dried, they can be held for several months at room temperature, but the best way to store them is in the refrigerator or freezer.

Pecans in the shell can be frozen at 10 degrees and held almost indefinitely. Shelled pecans, in air-tight containers such as plastic zipper-lock bags or glass containers can be held at 10 degrees for about a year or maybe longer.

It's important to put pecans in storage early. The quality is highest early, and it can only deteriorate. If pecans start to go bad before they're put in storage, there's no way to really improve on that quality.

When using pecans, bring out only the nuts you need to use for a particular recipe. Although frozen pecans can be thawed and refrozen without any harm to the nutmeat, it's best to just remove the amount of shelled nuts needed.

If shelled pecans are going to be shipped after coming out of cold storage, they should be conditioned for 24 hours to allow them to gain some moisture. Pecans shipped before being conditioned tend to break, and sometimes the shoulders will shatter.

The trees I've seen this year seem to have a large number of pecans although I've not heard too much yet about the quality. Therefore, early harvest and proper storage is important to preserve those nuts that are of high quality. Pecans can be stored at room temperature for several months but it's best to refrigerate or freeze.

Now bring on Thanksgiving and those homemade pecan pies!

Calendar

- November 3 Pasture Walk 2-6 pm. Cabe Brothers Angus Farm. RSVP by October 29. \$5 at registration. Call 706 384-2843 to sign up or for details.
- December 3 Athletic Field Management. 9:30 am – 12 Noon at Franklin County Rec Department. No charge. RSVP by calling 706 384-2843.