NUTTY BAKER GOES WILD IN THE KITCHEN!

Posted by Zel Allen's nutgourmet on August 13, 2009

I know I'm not alone when I say I have a thing for pistachios. They're so darned lovable in practically every dish I've put them into. I had this wild idea to create a totally whole-grain, no-yeast bread and pack it with pistachios. I did it and it's a winner!

Preparing, baking, and eating this bread will feel like Mother Nature paid a visit to your kitchen. This is not the airy white bread that comes from highly processed grains and leaves you with little nourishment. Because, this bread is made from truly whole grains and is prepared without yeast, it will be heavier, considerably denser, and delightfully earthy because it's full of flavorful savory ingredients that give it a chewy texture.

Most of all, it's delicious, but there's something else very special about this bread. Wheat berries and oat groats deliver an impressive array of vitamins and minerals, 20 in all, plus protein, fiber, and the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin. The oat groats add another dimension to the nutrition package—they contain soluble fiber that helps to lower cholesterol naturally.

PISTACHIO CAPER BREAD

Yield: 2 small loaves (4 to 6 servings per loaf)

5 1/2 cups water, divided
1 cup oat groats
1 cup wheat berries
1 tablespoon psyllium seed husks
2/3 cup raw pistachios
2/3 cup dehydrated onions
1/2 cup well-drained capers
6 cloves garlic, finely minced
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper

1. Place the oat groats and wheat berries into a large bowl and rinse the grains. Add 4 cups of the water to the grains and soak for 8 to 24 hours.

2. Preheat the oven to 300 degrees and line a large jellyroll pan with parchment paper. Drain and rinse the soaked grains and put them into the food processor with 1 1/4 cups of the remaining water. Process the grains in 2 batches.

3. Combine the remaining 1 1/4 cups of water with the psyllium husks in a small bowl. Stir well and set aside for about 2 minutes, or until they are ground to a coarse meal and all the liquid is well incorporated. Stop the machine occasionally to scrape down the sides of the work bowl. If your processor has a small capacity, process the grains in 2 batches.

4. Transfer the grains to a large bowl and add the pistachios, onions, capers, garlic, salt, and pepper. Mix well to distribute the ingredients evenly.

5. Spoon the mixture onto the prepared jellyroll pans in two even piles and use the spoon to shape the loaves into thick rectangles about 5 x 7-inches.

6. Lightly cover the loaves with aluminum foil, shiny side down, and bake for 1 hour and 45 minutes. Remove the foil and bake 10 minutes longer. Cool completely, slice, and serve.

Notes:

Oat groats and wheat berries are available in natural food markets. Psyllium seed husks absorb water and act as a binder. They are also available in natural food markets.
To freeze, wrap the cooled breads separately in heavy-duty zipper-lock plastic bags. Frozen, they will keep well for up to 4 months.

ALMOND BUTTER TURNS SAUCY

Posted by Zel Allen's nutgourmet on July 22, 2009

Being thoroughly acquainted with myself, and feeling relatively content with that acquaintanceship, I recognize I have become much too much a creature of habit—not too different from my fellow humanoids. I refer to my food buying habits—specifically nut products.

Eons ago I tossed the processed, hydrogenated nut butters out of my pantry and literally became a zealot for natural nut butters. I checked every ingredient label with the same scrutiny as Fuzzy, my cat who sniffs and rejects every new food I’ve tried on him. Only the purest roasted nut butters were allowed to grace my morning toast.

But I recently had my epiphany when I attended the Natural Products EXPO way back in March of this year, 2009 that is. I discovered a ton of nut products that peaked my curiosity. Out went the boring habits and in came a host of new items, still scrutinized for their healthful properties, but new nonetheless.

One of those products came from a company called Once Again Nut Butters that enhanced one of their many varieties of almond butter with flaxseed oil. Flaxseeds are loaded with Omega 3 fatty acids. Not a bad idea, I thought, since it’s an essential fatty acid that offers a ton of health benefits.

For several years I’ve heard and seen radio and TV commercials touting the benefits of eating fatty fish for its Omega 3 fats. Magazines and newspapers print articles pushing salmon as if it were the only source of these good fats. All I’ve read about Omega 3 describes the essential fatty acid as able to reduce the risk of coronary artery disease and stroke, boost the immune system, and reduce inflammation in the arteries. Those benefits sound great, but vegans are not amenable to chowing down on a plateful of salmon.

Instead, a compassionate soul like me has found a number of animal-free sources for this essential fatty acid—namely flaxseeds and flaxseed oil, walnuts, soybeans, tofu, canola oil, and dark leafy greens.

So there on the market shelf stood a jar of smooth almond butter with Omega 3. The ingredient label read “dry roasted almonds, flax seed oil.” Pretty darned pure, I thought. It passed the first test. Well, lights didn’t flash, nor did bells ring, but something came alive within and urged me to put it into my shopping cart. Then a surprising thing happened! I felt compelled to buy the jar next to it as well. That one was certified organic raw almond butter. WOW! Something wondrous was happening.

It was with the first taste of this OMEGA 3-enhanced almond butter that I experienced true elation. At that moment I believed I had tasted the sweetest almond butter on earth until I spooned the organic raw almond butter onto my toast next to the roasted nut butter. It was sweeter still! That was a total surprise. I eat raw almonds regularly, but never thought of buying a jar of raw almond butter. Could it be that one taste is enough to create a devotee?

Inspired to the max I decided this fabulous almond butter had to join my family and me at the table not only for breakfast, but also for dinner. An instant flash of AhhhHahhh coaxed me into the kitchen, made me grab the jar of Omega 3 almond butter, and cook up an almond sauce with savory flavors perfect to spoon over the brown rice pasta I had planned for dinner. I aimed for a sauce that was well seasoned, thick, and creamy but didn’t expect the rewarding flavors that resulted. This sauce was so indulgent and rich in flavor, it gave a simple pasta dish an elegant gourmet touch. With the leftovers, I made a veggie Gado Gado, giving the dish a unique new twist. It’s usually made with a peanut sauce.
SAVORY ALMOND SAUCE

Yield: makes enough sauce for 1 pound of pasta

1 cup chopped onions
3/4 cup water
3 cloves garlic, finely minced
Pinch cayenne

3 cups vegetable broth
1 cup roasted almond butter
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon chili powder
1/2 teaspoon lemon juice

3 tablespoons crushed toasted almonds

1. Combine the onions, water, garlic, and cayenne in a large deep skillet and cook, stirring frequently, over high heat for about 3 to 4 minutes, or until the onions are softened and become translucent.
2. Add the vegetable broth, almond butter, cumin, coriander, salt, chili powder, and lemon juice and adjust the heat to gently simmer for 7 to 10 minutes, stirring frequently. The sauce will begin to thicken in about 5 or 6 minutes.
3. Serve over pasta and garnish the top of each dish with a sprinkle of the crushed toasted almonds.

Refrigerated in a covered container, leftovers will keep for about 4 to 5 days.

Note:
The sauce has a tendency to thicken as it stands. Thin it to desired consistency beginning with small amounts of water. Refrigerated leftovers will become almost solid. Thin with water and reheat over medium-low heat.

BEAT METABOLIC SYNDROME WITH NUTS!

A beautiful summer lunch or a delicious light dinner, this tasty salad has eye appeal, flavor satisfaction, and health benefits to boot. Many health studies that focused on lowering cholesterol show that a small amount of nuts, about 1.5 to 3 ounces daily, can result in lowered cholesterol, especially when the nuts replace other saturated fats in the diet.

Hazelnuts became an effective remedy in a study conducted at the University of Rovira I Virgili, Spain, that examined the effects of nuts on a Mediterranean diet in those who showed signs of metabolic syndrome. The researchers of the randomized trial divided the patients into three groups, each following a Mediterranean diet: a low-fat control group, a group with added olive oil, and a third group that ate nuts in place of the added olive oil.

The nut-consuming group was given packets containing 30 grams of nuts to be eaten daily, a measurement that equals slightly over 1 ounce. The nuts were a combination of hazelnuts, walnuts, and almonds. There were no restrictions on calorie intake. The researchers followed the participants for one year and concluded the nut group showed a decrease in metabolic syndrome of 13.7%, while the olive oil group decreased 6.7%, and the control group decreased only 2%.
Other studies suggest that eating nuts regularly show benefits for weight loss, lowered insulin resistance, lower LDL cholesterol, and lowered risk for cardiovascular heart disease.

Because nuts are so delicious and versatile, they’re easy to include in the daily diet. Enjoy!

STUFFED TOMATOES WITH ROASTED NUTS

Yield: 4 servings

1/2 cup pecans
1/2 cup hazelnuts
3 to 4 zucchinis, coarsely chopped (about 4 to 5 cups)
1 medium carrot, coarsely chopped
1 large red bell pepper, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 tablespoon seasoned rice vinegar
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
Pinch cayenne
Freshly ground black pepper

4 lettuce leaves
4 large tomatoes
1/2 avocado, mashed or thinly sliced
4 black olives (Kalamata, salt-cured, or regular)

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Place the hazelnuts and pecans on separate baking sheets and roast for 10 minutes. Pour the pecans onto a dish to cool. Pour the roasted hazelnuts onto a kitchen towel, wrap it up, and set aside for 10 minutes. Rub the hazelnuts in the towel vigorously to remove some of the skins and set aside to cool. Place both nuts in a zipper-lock plastic bag and coarsely chop them with a hammer. Transfer them to a large bowl and set aside.

2. Separately, place the zucchinis, carrot, and bell pepper into the food processor and process until finely minced, but not pureed. Add them to the bowl with the nuts.

3. Add the lime juice, rice vinegar, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, cayenne, and pepper and mix well. Adjust seasonings, if needed.

4. Line 4 plates with the lettuce leaves. Create tomato flowers by placing them with the stem end down on the cutting board. Cut 8 wedges but don’t cut all the way through. Gently spread the wedges to create a bed for the nut and vegetable stuffing. Place a tomato flower on each lettuce-lined plate.

5. Divide the stuffing between the tomatoes and stuff the tomato flowers, placing some of the stuffing between the wedges. Garnish with the avocado and top with a black olive.

Reference:
Only a nut like me could get ecstatic about the Northern Nut Growers Association celebrating its 100th annual meeting from July 19 to July 23, 2009 at Purdue University in Indiana. Imagine—an organization in existence for 100 years and still going strong.

And I'm a devout devotee of The American Chestnut Foundation, an organization with high hopes of soon restoring the American chestnut to its once lush forests along the Appalachian slopes using scientific breeding and backcrossing methods to produce a blight-resistant American chestnut.

Both organizations work with passion and dedication to researching, planting, breeding, and growing the best tasting, most nutritious nuts in the world. And because of their research, amazing developments in health science have come to the forefront. And I'm not ashamed to admit I'm a nut groupie who loves to read their newsletters.

Here’s some awesome news. The researchers at the University of Portland in Oregon discovered that the nuts, shells, leaves, limbs, and bark of the hazelnut tree produce a chemical called paclitaxel. Even the fungi that attack the hazelnut tree produce paclitaxel. That’s big news because paclitaxel is the active ingredient in the drug taxol, manufactured by Bristol-Myers Squibb, and used for treating patients with breast or ovarian cancer and the AIDS-related cancer Kaposi’s sarcoma.

Until now, the drug was manufactured by extraction from the needles of the yew tree, a very costly process. With the discovery of paclitaxel contained in the hazelnut tree, nut growers now have a greater motivation to produce the varieties of hazelnut trees that contain the greatest quantities of the chemical. While hazelnuts contain some paclitaxel, eating them won’t offer sufficient quantities to offer treatment. The drug's potency comes from a larger concentration of paclitaxel.

I was delighted to discover a recent study by the Mayo Clinic, published June 5, 2009 on their website, confirming that eating nuts regularly in small amounts, about 1.5 ounces a day, is good for the heart. The article, referenced below, quotes the Food and Drug Administration’s July 2003 statement that says evidence "suggests but does not prove" that eating nuts reduces heart disease risk.

The Mayo Clinic says the variety of nut is not what matters. It’s that nuts, in general, contain a combination of such valuable components like mono and polyunsaturated fats, L. arginine, fiber, vitamin E, and plant sterols that work together to lower cholesterol, especially the LDL cholesterol, and reduce the risk of developing blood clots that often cause fatal heart attacks. The amino acid L. arginine in nuts benefits the arteries by keeping them flexible to allow better blood flow. Plant sterols that naturally occur in nuts are plant fats that help to lower cholesterol by preventing its absorption during the process of digestion.

Instead of consuming less healthy snacks, the Mayo Clinic suggests those with heart disease would benefit from eating nuts instead that can help patients focus on a more heart-healthy diet.

To help keep you on the path to good health, here’s a tasty recipe for an easy summer sandwich that features hazelnuts, carrots, and healthy, fiber-rich whole grain bread.

***************

These tasty hazelnut-studded sandwiches can be quickly assembled for a spontaneous picnic outing. Include a bean salad packed with chopped veggies, fresh fruit, and some vegan cookies, and you’ve got the makings of a great meal outdoors. For a stay-at-home light lunch, present the sandwiches with flair by cutting them into quarters and garnishing the plate with a fruit salsa.

***************

**NUTTY CARROT SANDWICH**

Yield: 4 sandwiches

3 large carrots, peeled and coarsely shredded
2/3 cup hazelnuts, finely chopped in the food processor
6 to 8 stuffed green olives, minced
1 small garlic clove, minced
1/4 to 1/2 cup vegan mayonnaise

8 slices whole-grain bread
16 to 20 whole fresh basil or mint leaves

1. Combine the carrots, hazelnuts, green olives, and garlic in a medium bowl. Add enough vegan mayonnaise to moisten them well and hold the ingredients together.
2. Spread one side of each slice of bread with a light coating of mayonnaise, and spoon the nutty carrot mixture on 4 of the slices. Arrange the basil or mint leaves over the carrot mixture and top with the remaining bread.

Note:
For richer flavor, roast the hazelnuts. To roast, place the nuts on a baking sheet and place in a preheated 350-degree oven for 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the nuts and pour them onto a kitchen towel. Wrap them in the towel and set aside for 10 minutes. Roll the nuts in the towel vigorously to remove some of the skins and set aside to cool completely. Chop the nuts coarsely in the food processor or place them in a zipper-lock plastic bag and pound them gently with a hammer until coarsely chopped.

References:


Susman, Ed. StopGettingSick.com Going Nuts over Paclitaxel http://www.stopgettingsick.com/template.cfm-1572

Chocolate Chip Cookie Look-Alikes

I love teaching plant-based cooking classes. What gives me so much pleasure is seeing the surprised looks and hearing the delightful expressions that come from students who are amazed that plant-based foods that spotlight nuts actually taste pretty darned good and are crammed full nutritious natural ingredients. The menu for a recent cooking class featured these very nutty bean patties made from black beans, pine nuts, and walnuts. The students loved them so much, they made both platters of patties disappear.

While walnuts and pine nuts are quite different in nature, they do have some beneficial health attributes in common. Both contain significant levels of arginine to encourage good blood flow, phytosterols to regulate the absorption of cholesterol, and antioxidants that protect our cells from oxidation. They excel in healthful mono and polyunsaturated fats. Both nuts contain plenty of protein, fiber, B vitamins, especially folate, and vitamin E.

Focusing on their uniqueness, walnuts score very high in the all-important omega-3 fatty acids with 9.08g for 3.5 ounces that help to reduce inflammation in the arteries. Pine nuts contain no omega-3 fatty acids, but they do have a whopping 1324 mg of copper for 3.5 ounces to help protect the bones. Both nuts contain plenty of protein, fiber, B vitamins, especially folate, and vitamin E.

While these nutty bean patties deliver a rich savory flavor, they look surprisingly like chocolate cookies dotted with chocolate chips. Enjoy these with fresh salsa on top or tuck them into a whole-wheat pita with lots of trimmings like chopped tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, and shredded lettuce. You can also enhance them with your favorite barbecue sauce.

This is one of the delicious recipes from my cookbook, The Nut Gourmet: Nourishing Nuts for Every Occasion.
ZESTY BLACK BEAN PATTIES

Yield: 9 to 10 patties (3-inch diameter)

1/4 cup raw pine nuts
1/4 cup raw coarsely chopped walnuts
1 small onion, coarsely chopped
2 cups cooked black beans, rinsed and drained*
1/2 cup oat bran or wheat germ
2 to 3 tablespoons water, as needed
1 teaspoon salt
3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
3/4 teaspoon ground coriander
3/4 teaspoon chili powder
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and lightly oil a large baking sheet or line it with parchment paper.
2. Combine the pine nuts and walnuts in the food processor and process until they are finely ground. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and set aside.
3. Put the onion into the food processor and chop until it is minced. Transfer to the bowl with the nut meal.
4. Measure 1/2 cup of the black beans and add them to the bowl with the nut meal. Put the remainder of the beans into the processor. Add the oat bran, water, salt, cumin, coriander, chili powder, garlic powder, and pepper and process until well blended. Spoon the mixture into the nut meal and mix well.
5. Drop the mixture from a large spoon onto the prepared baking sheet to form nine or ten 3-inch patties. Flatten the patties slightly so they will bake evenly. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes. Turn the patties over with a metal spatula and bake 10 to 12 minutes longer.

Note: If you prefer to use canned beans rather than cooking beans from scratch, 1 1/2 (15-ounce) cans will give you the 2 cups of beans needed for this recipe. Rinse and drain the beans before using.

PISTACHIO POWER KNOCKS DOWN HEART DISEASE RISK

Posted by Zel Allen’s nutgourmet on April 28, 2009

While there is still concern about salmonella contaminated pistachios, safe sources do exist. Check your local supplier, and ask questions about their suppliers. When you locate safe sources, stock up on them, prepare the incredibly delicious recipe below, and bone up on some heart-friendly pistachio facts.

Aside from being a tasty snack and a delicious addition to desserts, main dishes, soups, salads, sauces, and salad dressings, pistachios have proven themselves to be highly nutritious and medically effective in lowering the risk for coronary heart disease.

Several studies in recent years have focused on the natural cholesterol-lowering effects of pistachios without the use of statin drugs. One study conducted at Penn State University was a controlled feeding study using the American Heart Association Step 1 diet. The Step 1 study successfully demonstrated the powerful effects of pistachios in lowering total cholesterol by 8.4 percent and LDL cholesterol by 11.6 percent when eaten daily in three-ounce portions. Pistachios also contain high levels of antioxidants that aid in reducing inflammation in the arteries.

Another study conducted in Turkey and published in Nutrition, Metabolism & Cardiovascular Disease in 2006, examined the effects of pistachios on plasma lipid profile and oxidative status in 24 healthy men and 20 healthy women. After one week on their normal diets, half the group continued their regular diet, while the other half substituted pistachios for 20% of their daily calorie intake for three weeks.
Before and after the study, blood tests were charted for LDL (the bad cholesterol), HDL (the good cholesterol), total cholesterol, triglycerides, MDA (malondialdehyde), and AOP (antioxidant potential). After the three weeks, the pistachio group was found to have significantly decreased their total cholesterol, MDA levels, and total cholesterol to HDL levels, and the LDL/HDL ratios. The results showed that those on the pistachio diet decreased oxidative stress, improved their total cholesterol, and increased their HDL levels.

Those irresistible little green wonders are packed with protein and fiber, yet they are low in carbohydrates. Their high levels of good fats, mostly monounsaturated (fats), are part of their charm in lowering cholesterol. Pistachios are also a good source of arginine, a highly respected amino acid needed for the body to manufacture nitric oxide, known for its ability to dilate the blood vessels.

Natural plant fats called phytoesters are nature’s way of preventing the absorption of excess cholesterol into the blood. After peanuts, pistachios score next highest in phytoesters among the nut family with 214 mg of phytoesters for 3.5 ounces.

If you need a boost in potassium, count on pistachios with 1025 mg for that same 3.5 ounces. If you’re deficient in minerals like iron, zinc, copper, magnesium, or selenium, you might enjoy snacking on two generous handfuls of pistachios a day—that’s equal to about 3.5 ounces.

For so many nutritional needs, you can consider pistachios among your good friends. And to reap the benefit of pistachios to the fullest, be sure to reduce your intake of other dietary saturated fats, such as dairy products, meat, chicken, or fish. The studies and nutritional information were conducted using raw pistachios.

References:

Here’s a dish that frames beautiful, bright green pistachios with a backdrop of a golden brown garbanzo paté. Served as a casual, make-ahead dish, the paté becomes a tasty hot or cold filling for a sandwich. Cut it into squares and serve it as appetizer finger food at a party or picnic. To turn the paté into a hot or cold signature entrée, cut it into slices or wedges and serve them on a lettuce-lined platter with a dollop of Tofu Sour Cream and a sprinkling of paprika and minced chives topping each slice.

**GARBANZO BEAN PATE WITH PISTACHIOS**

**Yield:** 8 to 10 servings

1 large onion, finely minced
1 large carrot, peeled and finely minced
5 cloves garlic, minced
1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil
1 teaspoon curry powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
3/4 cup raw pistachios

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
3 tablespoons tamari or soy sauce
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 3/4 cups garbanzo bean flour
3 1/2 cups water

**Garnish**
1 medium tomato, sliced, slices halved
1 Japanese or Persian cucumber, sliced
Sprigs of fresh dill or cilantro

1. Line a 9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pan or a ring mold with enough plastic wrap to drape over the sides and set aside.
2. Combine the onion, carrot, garlic, basil, curry powder, cumin, salt, pepper, and thyme in a large, deep non-stick skillet. Add the soy sauce, olive oil, and lemon juice and cook and stir over high heat for 3 to 4 minutes or until the onion is soft and transparent. Reduce the heat to medium.
3. Add the garbanzo bean flour to the skillet and add the water, a little at a time, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until the mixture is smooth. Adjust the heat to medium-high, if needed, and cook for 20 to 25 minutes, stirring frequently, until the mixture reaches the consistency of very thick porridge and begins to pull away from the sides and bottom of the pan. A thin, dry crust will form on the bottom of the pan.
4. Add the pistachios and stir well to distribute them evenly throughout the mixture. Spoon the paté mixture into the prepared loaf pan or ring mold, pressing firmly to eliminate any air spaces. Set aside for about 30 minutes to cool the paté. Fold the excess plastic wrap over the paté, covering it completely, and chill for at least 4 to 12 hours to firm.
5. Uncover the paté and unmold it onto an attractive serving platter. Garnish the top with quartered cucumber
slices and surround the paté with the tomato halves topped with cucumber slices. Tuck a few springs of herbs around the base of the paté and cut it into serving slices or wedges.

**Note:** Garbanzo bean flour, also called chickpea flour, can be found in Middle Eastern or Indian markets. Because this special dish needs to be refrigerated for a minimum of 4 hours to cool and firm, begin preparation several hours ahead or the day before.

**Variation:** Other bean flours, such as lentils or green split peas, can be substituted for the chickpea flour. To create your own bean flour, measure 2 cups of dried green or brown lentils or green split peas and grind them into flour in a small electric mini chopper-grinder or coffee grinder. This quantity will equal the chickpea flour measurement. You will also need to increase the water measurement by approximately 2 tablespoons.

### TOFU SOUR CREAM

**Yield:** 1 1/2 cups

1 12.3-ounce box extra firm silken tofu
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon rice vinegar
1/4 teaspoon salt

Combine all the ingredients in a food processor and process until smooth and creamy. Use immediately or chill for an hour or two before serving. Refrigerated, Tofu Sour Cream keeps for 1 week.

---

### WALNUTS IN A TIE WITH FISH: OMEGA 3 FATTY ACIDS

**THE PRIZE**

Posted by Zel Allen’s nutgourmet on April 5, 2009

Reap the immune-boosting Omega 3 benefits of walnuts while enjoying a breakfast of irresistibly delicious muffins.

In an article titled “Dietary Alpha-Linolenic Acid Reduces Inflammatory and Lipid Cardiovascular Risk Factors in Hypercholesterolemic Men and Women” published in the November 2004 issue of *The Journal of Nutrition*, Penny Kris-Etherton, researcher and professor of nutrition at Penn State University, says, “The important new finding with our research is that a diet high in walnuts beneficially affects multiple risk factors for coronary heart disease, which can have a greater impact on decreasing cardiovascular risk than just targeting single risk factors.”

While many people think of fish as the only source of Omega 3 fatty acids, Dr. Kris-Etherton says, “The omega-3 fatty acids in walnuts were converted to the same omega 3 fatty acids found in marine sources, and had a similar effect on inflammation. Reducing inflammation can help decrease the process of arteriosclerosis—the development and build-up of plaque in the arteries.”

Dr. Kris-Etherton stresses that walnuts are an excellent source of not one, but two essential unsaturated fatty acids, alpha linolenic acid and linoleic acid. Walnuts are also an excellent source of fiber, protein, B vitamins, vitamin E, and minerals like calcium, potassium, magnesium, iron, zinc, copper, and selenium. Maple Dream Muffins is another delicious recipe from my book *The Nut Gourmet*.

-------------------------------

A FAMILY FAVORITE, these moist, spicy, and nutty muffins are an excellent choice to serve for brunch or breakfast on the run. They’re so fully flavored they need no jam or other topping. If this recipe makes too many muffins for your needs, simply tuck a few into the freezer for a future occasion. Accompany the muffins with plenty of fresh fruit in season and complete the morning meal with a steaming cup of herbal tea.

---

**MAPLE DREAM MUFFINS**
Yield: 18 muffins

Prune Puree
1 cup pitted prunes
1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon water

Batter
1 1/2 cups coarsely chopped walnuts
1 1/3 cups maple syrup
1 cup vanilla flavored soymilk
1 teaspoon maple extract
1 1/2 cups old fashioned rolled oats
3/4 cup whole wheat flour
3/4 cup whole wheat pastry flour
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup chopped dates

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and line 18 standard-size muffin cups with paper baking cups.
2. Combine the prunes and water in the blender and process until smooth. Measure 1/2 cup of the prune puree for the recipe and set it aside. Refrigerate or freeze the remaining prune puree for a future recipe.
3. Toast the walnuts in a 10-inch non-stick skillet for 1 to 2 minutes over high heat, tossing continuously with a wooden spoon until lightly browned. Immediately transfer the walnuts to a dish to cool and set them aside. Alternatively, place the walnuts on a baking sheet and roast them in the preheated oven for 8 to 10 minutes.
4. Combine the reserved prune puree, maple syrup, soymilk, and maple extract in a small bowl.
5. Combine the rolled oats, whole wheat flour, whole wheat pastry flour, cinnamon, baking powder, and baking soda in a large mixing bowl, and stir with a wire whip to distribute evenly. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and add the maple syrup mixture. Add the dates and 1 1/4 cups of the walnuts and mix well.
6. Fill the muffin cups two-thirds full with batter and top with the remaining walnuts. Bake for 20 to 22 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the muffin comes out dry. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Storage: Covered with plastic wrap or packed into zipper-lock plastic bags and stored in the refrigerator, leftover Maple Dream Muffins will keep for one week. To serve, warm them in a preheated 350-degree oven for 5 to 8 minutes. For longer storage, pack the muffins into heavy-duty zipper-lock plastic bags and freeze them for up to three months.

Notes: If you prefer, 1/2 cup jarred prune puree may be used in place of the pitted prunes and water.
If you do not have whole wheat pastry flour on hand, use an equal amount of all-purpose whole wheat flour. This will produce a slight heavier muffin, but the flavor will still be deliciously satisfying.

Baking Hint: To prevent nuts from sinking to the bottom of the muffins or cakes, toss the nuts with the flour so they are lightly coated before adding them to the batter.

MACADAMIA NUTS ON TRIAL

Posted by Zel Allen's nutgourmet on March 6, 2009

Macadamia nuts are frequently treated as outcasts, shunned because they're charged with being TOO HIGH IN FAT. Even the FDA refused to include them on the list of nuts they considered acceptable for health claims. Do macadamias need to prove their innocent goodness with a trial?

Fear and uncertainty have caused people to hesitate before reaching for a handful of delicious, creamy macadamia nuts. But should we really hesitate to put trust in one of nature's wondrous foods? Convincing scientific trials claim multiple health benefits from munching on a handful of macadamias a day. No trial is actually needed, but a nod from scientific studies can often clear up confusing information and reassure us about a food's health benefits.

Several studies since 2000 have proven that macadamia nuts CAN be included in a heart healthy diet. Macadamia, like all plant foods, have no cholesterol, but they do contain 75% total fat, 80% of which is monounsaturated. This high level of fat would naturally be a concern to anyone trying to avoid excess fat in his or her diet. But these nuts possess amazing properties that actually lower cholesterol in spite of their high fat levels.
Their high fat level also scares people who want to watch their weight or have a few pounds to lose. Several study authors expressed the same concern but found their study subjects actually lost a few pounds or stabilized their weight in macadamia trials.

Macadamias Lower Cholesterol

In a study in the April 14, 2008 issue of Science Daily, lead researcher Dr. Amy E. Griel of Penn State conducted a five-week cholesterol-lowering trial on male and female subjects with mildly elevated cholesterol by comparing the standard American diet with a diet substituting 1.5 ounces of macadamias for some of the fat and protein. Researchers matched the diets for fat content and reported the macadamia diet significantly lowered total cholesterol by 9.4 percent and LDL cholesterol by 8.9 percent compared with the standard American diet. The results were defining and the researchers stated that including macadamias in the diet lowered overall cardiovascular disease risk.

Because macadamia orchards are cultivated in diverse locations, the macadamia nut became a natural study subject in those regions. The University of Hawaii conducted a macadamia study in 2001 and reported similar success showing their participants consuming the macadamias decreased their total and LDL cholesterol when compared with those in the control group who followed the American Heart Association Step 1 Diet.

Macadamia nuts were the subject of a recent study conducted at the University of Newcastle in Australia and reported in the journal Lipids in 2007. The four-week study of 17 male participants with elevated cholesterol included 40 to 90 grams a day of macadamias. Researchers were looking specifically at blood markers for inflammation, coagulation, and arterial oxidation. The study authors found significantly lower blood markers of inflammation and oxidation. At the conclusion, the researchers suggested that regular consumption of macadamia nuts may play a role in reducing the biomarkers of oxidative stress, thrombosis, and inflammation, the typical risk factors for coronary artery disease.

Reduce Coronary Artery Risk

While the macadamia’s rich fats proved successful in reducing coronary artery risk, researchers felt there may be other bioactive factors aside from the monounsaturated fatty acids that were imparting impressive health benefits. Examining more closely, they found the monounsaturated fats contain oleic acid, known as Omega 9, a beneficial fat found in other foods like avocados, almonds, and olive oil. Oleic acid is a naturally heart protective fat that helps to maintain the function and flexibility of the cell structure.

Findings at a 2002 macadamia conference in Australia show that the nuts contain plant sterols, which are natural plant fats found in fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, and seeds and play a role in lowering elevated blood cholesterol and reducing the risk of heart disease.

Macadamias also contain palmitoleic acid, which makes up almost one-third of the content of monounsaturated fat. According to cardiologist Dr. Ross Walker at Walker Health Resources in Australia, “The palmitoleic acid in macadamias works to stabilize, the rhythm in the heart. Omega 3 fatty acids and the palmitoleic acid in macadamias settles the heart down.” He also believes that if you are prone to heart disease or to irregular heartbeats, you would benefit from a daily dose of 10 to 15 macadamias and reduce the risk of sudden cardiac death.

Health Claims for Nuts

In July 2003, the FDA issued the following health claim statement: “Scientific evidence suggests but does not prove that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts (such as almonds, hazelnuts, pecans, pistachios, peanuts, some pine nuts, and walnuts) as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease.”

The FDA’s list of approved nuts for this health claim does not presently include macadamias because they exceed the limit of 4 grams of saturated fat per 50 grams of nuts. Macadamias contain 6 grams of saturated fat for the 50 grams, but researchers studying macadamias suggested they should be included considering their significant health benefits.

Over the years several studies agree that macadamia nuts are effective in the prevention of coronary artery disease and stressed they should be included in the daily diet by substituting them for other saturated-fat-containing foods. Aside from their multiple heart-health advantages, macadamias are just plain good eating and are an excellent source of high protein, high fiber, and healthful plant fats that make them a nutritious food. Enjoy macadamia nuts and reap the benefits.
NUT TRADITIONS IN AFGHANISTAN
Posted by Zel Allen's nutgourmet on February 25, 2009

Over the years while I’ve been teaching vegetarian cooking classes, I've developed recipes for a number of different international cuisines. Recently, I was asked if I could teach an Afghan cooking class at the Valencia County Library in Valencia, California. Naturally, I said I could. A little research turned up some delightful recipes I adapted to the vegetarian palate. The class was well attended with enthusiastic students feasting on Afghanistan's charismatic cuisine featuring two delicious nut dishes I’m happy to share.

Afghanistan, I discovered, was along the silk route and adopted many of the spices from China and India as camel caravans crossed the Afghan desert. Spices like cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, pepper fenugreek, turmeric, cumin, and coriander added exotic flavor to their cuisine, while their native almonds, walnuts, and pistachios contributed pleasing texture and heartiness.

Of special interest to me was that almonds, walnuts, and pistachios were native to Afghanistan and became a traditional ingredient in savory dishes as well as desserts. In both recipes below, Afghani Stuffed Peppers and Carrot Halwah, chopped pistachios and almonds are sprinkled on top as garnishes, adding appealing texture, and healthful dining.

Afghan Nut Customs
Serving tea and white sugared almonds is a familiar custom during Afghan festivals. *Eid-e-Qorban* is celebrated at the end of the Haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, when families and friends come visiting each other to drink a cup of tea together and share some nuts, sweets, and sugared almonds called noql.

Long before Islam arrived, Afghans began celebrating the New Year on the vernal equinox, March 21. A variety of nutty desserts awaited the visiting celebrants. One treat, a unique nut and fruit compote called *Miwa Naurozee* is an favorite sweet prepared by soaking dried fruits and nuts for two days. The nuts are blanched and combined with the soaked fruits, along with their soaking juices, then served in bowls or cups. Other nut treats, like the nut brittle *Halwa-e-Swanak*, made with walnuts and pistachios, and *Sheer Payra*, a walnut and pistachio confection, may be offered to guests during the New Year celebration. These holiday traditions are still practiced today.

Many versions of *halwa*, a pudding-like sweet that includes either walnuts, almonds, or pistachios or any combination of them, is customarily offered as thanksgiving, called *Nazer*, to recognize a number of meaningful occasions like returning from a journey, visiting a holy shine, or recovering from an illness. People offering *Nazer* give their neighbors, passersby, and the poor with a dish of *halwa* or other sweet.

Almonds have a very special role in the typical Afghan wedding, which takes place in two stages. The religious ceremony is first and is not attended by the bride. During the celebration portion the bride and groom are brought together and seated on a raised platform. After serving the newlyweds a fruit drink called *sharbat* and a wedding sweet called *molida*, sugared almonds and other confections are showered over them as a symbol of fruitfulness and prosperity.

---------------------------------------------
This exotic recipe originated as a ground lamb-stuffed chicken dish, but with lots of tweaking, the result is an extreme makeover. This tasty adaptation is now a wholesome vegan entrée with good looks, irresistible aromas, and hearty dining. I served the meal with a big tossed salad and a delicious grain called farro. However, more typical of Afghan cuisine would have been some Basmati rice garnished with chopped pistachios and minced parsley.

**AFGHANI STUFFED PEPPERS**
Yield: 6 servings

1 green bell pepper, cut in half lengthwise and cored
1 red bell pepper, cut in half lengthwise and cored
1 yellow bell pepper, cut in half lengthwise and cored

**Filling**
1 small onion, diced
1 small carrot, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons water
2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
1/2 cup raisins
1/4 cup slivered almonds
1/4 cup pistachios
1 pound extra firm tofu, crumbled
Zest of 1 small orange
1 to 1 1/2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon ground cardamom
1 teaspoon dried dill weed
Freshly ground black pepper

Tomato Sauce Topping
3 medium tomatoes, coarsely chopped
1/2 medium onion, coarsely chopped
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
1/2 teaspoon chili powder
Salt and pepper
1/4 cup unsweetened soy yogurt

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees, place the prepared peppers into a 7 x 9-inch baking dish, and set aside.
2. TO PREPARE THE FILLING, combine the onion, carrot, garlic, water, and extra virgin olive oil in a large,
deep skillet and sauté about 10 to 12 minutes, or until the onions and carrots become lightly browned and are
beginning to caramelize. Add more water to the pan as needed to prevent burning the onions.
3. Add the raisins, almonds, and pistachios and cook 1 minute. Add the tofu, orange zest, lemon juice, salt,
cardamom, dill weed, and pepper and mix well. Adjust the seasonings, if needed and stuff the mixture into the
prepared peppers, packing the mixture firmly. Set aside and prepare the sauce.
4. TO PREPARE THE TOMATO SAUCE TOPPING, place the tomatoes and onions into the food processor
and process until they are coarsely pureed.
5. Transfer the tomatoes to a 2-quart saucepan and add the cumin, coriander, and chili powder. Cook over
medium high heat for 4 to 6 minutes, or until the sauce has thickened slightly, and season with salt and pepper.
6. Add the yogurt to the tomato sauce and stir well. Spoon a generous quantity of the sauce over the stuffed
peppers. Cover the pan tightly with aluminum foil, shiny side down, and bake for 1 hour.

While milk and ghee (clarified butter) are traditional ingredients in Afghan cooking, they have been replaced
with alternative choices in this vegan version of a classic dessert served in Afghanistan and throughout many
parts of the Middle East, including India. Still, the result is a tasty, brightly colored carrot pudding dotted with
nuts and raisins and a hint of exotic spice. Serve the pudding warmed, room temperature, or chilled.

HALWAH-E-ZARDAK

Yield: 4 to 5 servings
4 tablespoons dairy-free margarine (like Earth Balance)
3 tablespoons raw pistachios, coarsely ground
2 rounded tablespoons golden raisins
4 cups coarsely grated carrots (about 1 pound)
1 1/2 cups almond, soy, or rice milk
1/2 cup organic sugar
1 teaspoon rosewater
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
1 tablespoon slivered almonds

1. Place 2 tablespoons of the margarine into a deep 10 to 12-inch skillet and add 2 tablespoons of the
pistachios and all of the raisins. Cook over high heat for about 1 minute, stirring constantly, to brown the
pistachios lightly and plump the raisins. Remove to a small bowl and set aside.
2. Melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of margarine in the skillet. Add the carrots and cook for about 5 minutes,
or until they just begin to brown.
3. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of margarine in the skillet. Add the carrots and cook for about 5 minutes,
or until they just begin to brown.
4. Add the cooked pistachios and raisins, the rosewater, lemon juice, and cardamom and mix well. Spoon into
4 or 5 small dessert bowls or teacups and garnish with the remaining 1 tablespoon coarsely ground pistachios
and a few slivered almonds.
TREASURE IN A NUTSHELL

I thought it might be helpful to have an overview of the nutritional highlights of tree nuts. While this listing is certainly a good quick reference, it only scratches the surface of the plethora of health benefits nuts have to offer.

It may seem that I’m promoting nuts as some sort of miracle food. Not so. I’m just recognizing nuts are one of Mother Nature’s many gems that are packed with goodness, especially when paired with other foods that are nutrient-dense and low in saturated fats.

In the information below there may be some terms that are unfamiliar. Here is a brief explanation:

**Arginine** – an amino acid that changes into nitric oxide that relaxes blood vessels and permits better blood flow. May help alleviate coronary artery disease like chest pain and clogged arteries (called atherosclerosis).

**Phytosterols** – natural plant fats found in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds that benefits the body by interfering with the absorption of excess cholesterol.

**Antioxidants** – combination of vitamins, minerals, and enzymes found in plant foods that prevents our tissues from oxidation that leads to degenerative diseases like cancer and heart disease.

**Tryptophan** – an essential amino acid the body can’t manufacture and must get from food. Necessary for normal growth in infants and for nitrogen balance in adults. Used by the body to help make niacin and serotonin. Serotonin thought to produce healthy sleep and a stable mood.

**Folate** – also known as folic acid or folacin, a form of the water-soluble Vitamin B9. Occurs naturally in food and can also be taken as a supplement. Helps prevent neural tube birth defects.

**ALMONDS**

- Lower cholesterol, especially LDL (bad cholesterol)
- Decrease risk for coronary heart disease
- Lower risk for diabetes
- Promote weight control
- Good source of phytosterols
- Excellent source of arginine
- High in protein,
- High in monounsaturated fats
- High in minerals: calcium, iron, zinc, potassium,
- High in vitamin E.
- High in arginine
- Packed with antioxidants

**BRAZIL NUTS**

- Provide powerful antioxidants
- Highest level of selenium of all nuts
- High in beneficial mono- and polyunsaturated fats
- High in protein
- High in minerals: calcium, copper, iron, potassium, and zinc
- Source of arginine

**CASHEWS**

- Source of arginine
- High in beneficial monounsaturated fat
- High in protein
- High in minerals: copper, potassium
- High in folate
- Help to lower cholesterol and decrease risk for coronary heart disease
- Contain the highest levels of zinc of any nut
- Excellent source of phytosterols

**CHESTNUTS**
HAZELNUTS

- Super low in fats, especially saturated fat
- High in B vitamins, good level of folic acid
- The only nut to contain healthy level of vitamin C
- Promote weight loss
- Protect the heart
- Lower cholesterol

MACADAMIAS

- Contain the highest levels of copper of any nut
- Protect the bones and blood vessels
- High in minerals: calcium, potassium, zinc
- High in folic acid
- Lower cholesterol, especially LDL cholesterol
- High in heart-protective vitamin E
- High in fiber
- Good source of phytosterols

PEANUTS

- Highest in beneficial monounsaturated fats
- Highest in B vitamins of all nuts
- High in phytosterols
- High in fiber
- Source of arginine

PECANS

- Highest in antioxidants of any nut
- Good source of protein
- High in minerals: calcium, iron, potassium, zinc
- High in B vitamins, especially folic acid
- High in fiber

PINE NUTS

- Excellent source of arginine
- High in phytosterols
- Good levels of mono- and polyunsaturated fats to keep cholesterol in check
- Excellent source of protein
- High in vitamin E and B vitamins, especially folic acid
- High in fiber

PISTACHIOS

- Impressive levels of phytosterols
- Packed with antioxidants
- High in beneficial monounsaturated fats
- Good source of protein, calcium, iron, copper, and zinc
- High in vitamin E and B vitamins, especially folic acid
- High in fiber
- Excellent source of arginine

WALNUTS

- Only nut (except butternut) with essential Omega 3 fatty acids
- Lower cholesterol
- Combat cancer
- Boost memory
- Lift mood
- Protect against heart disease
- Help to develop more than 3 dozen neuron-transmitters for brain function
- High in tryptophan
- Loaded with antioxidants
- Good source of arginine
- Good source of protein
- Good source of minerals: calcium, copper, iron, zinc
- High in fiber
The Iowa Nut Growers Association has a long and rich history. It was incorporated in 1968, the original Directors were: Frank Kosek of Cedar Rapids - President. Providing educational opportunities on the various nuts of Iowa, the organization is comprised of predominantly hobbyists, backyard growers, and a few commercial orchards. Our membership is the strength of the organization. Several current and past members have been active with the Northern Nut Growers Association serving in leadership roles. When do growers need to irrigate and for how long? This is a question growers have been asking for years. The answer, though, is not as simple as the question. With a wide array of crops, soil types, irrigation methods and climates all playing factors in the answer to the question, we turned to key almond professionals in the irrigation industry to get some answers.