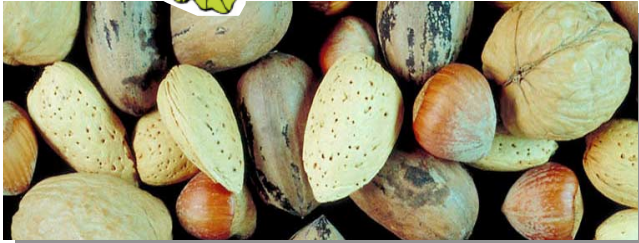




Nuts about Nuts!

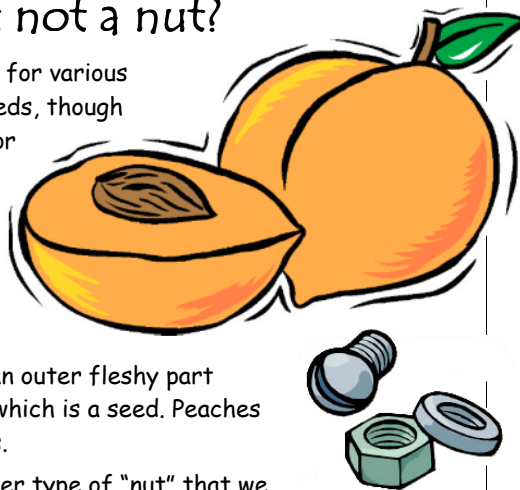


In plant biology, a true nut is a dry fruit which does not open to release its seed when mature. It contains a single seed and is covered by a thick hard shell. Examples of true nuts are acorns, hazelnuts and chestnuts.

When is a nut not a nut?

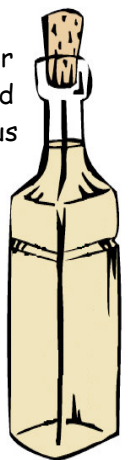
The term nut is also used for various hard-shelled fruits or seeds, though they are not true nuts. For example, pistachio, cashew and brazil nuts are really seeds. Peanuts belong to the pea family and almonds, walnuts and coconuts are drupes. A drupe is when an outer fleshy part surrounds a shell, inside which is a seed. Peaches and plums are also drupes.

Of course, there is another type of "nut" that we definitely cannot eat! Can you think what it is?



Oil in Nuts

As many nuts have a high fat or oil content, they can be pressed and the oil used for various purposes. Depending on the flavour or how well they burn, nut oils can be used for cooking or for salad dressings. Others are used to make health or skin products, and in the case of walnut oil, for making artists' paints. Nuts which are harvested for their oil include walnuts, pine nuts, almonds, hazelnuts, pistachio nuts and ground nuts. The macadamia nut, which is native to Australia, has one of the highest oil content of all nuts and is used in cooking, in salad and for skin products.

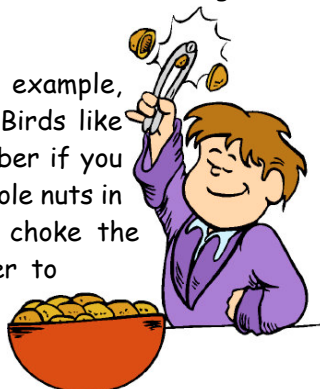


Food for Humans and Animals



Many nuts are a great source of nutrition for both humans and animals. Humans eat nuts because they give us energy and contain protein (for building muscles), vitamins and minerals. Though nuts are high in fat (and too much fat isn't good for us), some nuts have fats that are good, such as walnuts and almonds.

Lots of animals feed on nuts, for example, squirrels, woodmice and pine martens. Birds like to sharpen their beaks on nuts. Remember if you are feeding nuts to birds, always put whole nuts in a mesh feeder, otherwise they could choke the young birds. Also, it is important never to feed birds with salted nuts.



Kukui nut "clock"!

The Candlenut (kukui) tree is Hawaii's State tree. Its nuts have so much oil, that the people of Ancient Hawaii used to burn them as a source of light. The nuts were strung up and burnt one by one, each burning for 15 minutes. The burning time was so accurate that they could even be used to measure time.



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