

Walnuts

Scientific Name: *Juglans regia* Irish Name: Crann gallchnó

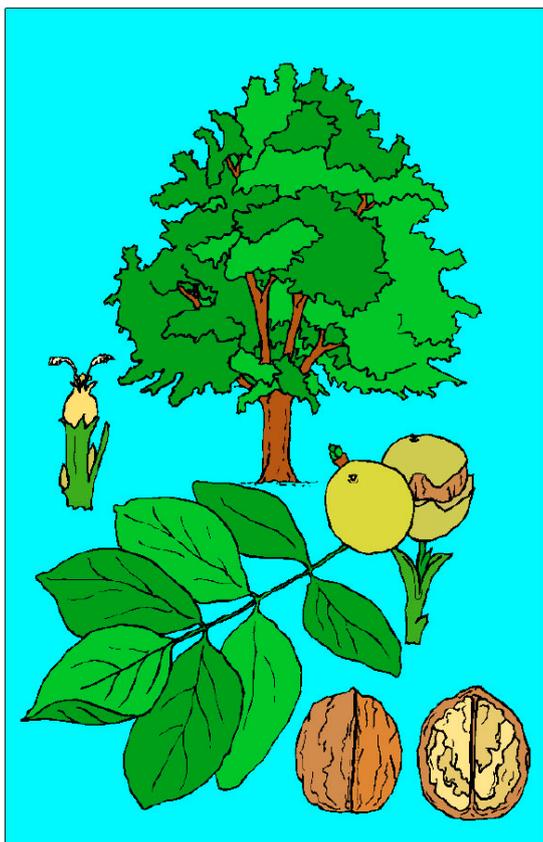


Technically the walnut is not a nut, it is actually the seed of a drupe, or stone fruit. A drupe has a fleshy outside and a hard stone inside, which eventually splits open to reveal the seed inside. What we think of as the walnut is actually the inner stone of a fruit. Other drupes include peaches, nectarines, apricots and cherries.

A Tough Nut to Crack!

When walnuts are ripe they can be shaken off the tree or picked up off the ground. They will need to be kept for a further few weeks in a warm, dry place to fully ripen and be ready to eat.

Eating walnuts have many health benefits for humans but they are also food for animals, such as the squirrel. Walnuts have a tough outer shell and while humans need a nutcracker to open them, squirrels just use their teeth!



Walnuts in Cooking and Baking

Walnuts are not just a tasty snack on their own but are often used in cooking and baking, particularly in rich fruit cakes, such as Christmas cakes. There are a number of flavours that go well together – banana and walnut bread and coffee and walnut cake are just a few. Walnuts can also be sprinkled on salads or served with cheese. Unripened walnuts are also pickled and eaten as an accompaniment to cheeses and in recipes, such as beef dishes. To keep walnuts fresh, store the walnuts in an airtight container.

The Walnut Tree

There are many species of walnut tree but the two most significant in Europe are the Common or English Walnut tree and the Black Walnut. Though they grow in Ireland, neither are native to here. The Common Walnut, which is also known as the Persian Walnut, originated in Persia (now called Iran) and was introduced into Britain by the Romans. The Black Walnut tree originated in North America. Walnut trees grow best in sunny, sheltered sites in deep, rich and well-drained soil. They are spreading, domed trees, and depending on the species, can grow up to 10-40m in height. All species are deciduous, which means they lose their leaves in winter time.

Walnut wood is a hardwood. Because of its stability when dried and its resistance to swelling and cracking, it is very good for furniture making, for example tables and display cases. For walnut trees to produce walnuts, it takes four to five years if grafted to a root stock or up to seven years if grown from a seedling.