

Nuts are Healthy Snacks

While recently shopping for holiday gifts, I noticed nuts were featured as gifts in many local stores. I am always interested in the history behind and where plants come from. I have never really researched the different nuts and below are some of what I found.

Nuts are a very healthy snack and it has been found that eating an ounce and a half of mixed nuts a day may help lower bad cholesterol levels and are an excellent source of protein and healthy fats. Not surprisingly, much of the nut production in the United States is centered in California.

An example of this is the English walnut. Although the name implies this tree is native to the British Isles, it is actually from Asia, where it was popularized and spread throughout Europe by the Romans. They regarded the nut so highly that in the Latin language, the word walnut can be translated as “nut fit for the gods.” From Europe, it was brought to North America by the English in the 1700s, and this is most likely why it has the name it does today. If you are interested in growing this tree at home, you can do so. Varieties labeled as Carpathian types survive best in colder climates. Idaho and Ambassador are two of these. Other edible relatives of this tree include black walnut that feature a harder shell but sweeter meat, heartnut and butternut. These can sometimes be found locally but are more commonly available by mail order or online.

Hazelnuts and filberts, also spread by the Romans, are common in stores. Both come from closely related trees and can be grown in most areas of Utah. Species like Turkish filbert not only produce edible nuts, but are also ornamental. They grow well in Utah and should be planted more. Hazelnut-butter is also increasing in popularity and is being promoted as a healthier alternative to peanut butter. One brand, Nutella, is available at many stores.

Pistachios, one of my favorites, are native to Iran and surrounding areas and became popular in warmer areas of Europe in the middle ages. They were introduced in California in the early 1900s and are grown locally in the St. George area. Before the Shaw of Iran fell, we imported most of our pistachios from Iran, but now most are produced in California.

Pecans are also common and are one of the few popular nuts native to the Americas. They were exported to Europe in the 1600s by the Spanish and have spread to many other areas of the world. Pecans grow in Utah but usually will not produce fruit because our growing season is too short. The exception is St. George, where some commercial growers exist. If you are interested in growing pecans for the nuts themselves, types are available online or by mail order that will ripen fruit in a shorter period of time than the standard tree.

Have a happy holiday season and may all be well with you.