

Planting nuts

A forester in southeastern Minnesota once said, "If you want to plant walnuts, take two bushels of nuts into the forest – one for the squirrels to bury and eat later, and one bushel for them to bury, forget about, and let grow."

Nuts generally fall from trees in September and October. When possible, collect nuts from trees with good stem form (for timber production) or large nuts with a high percentage of kernel (for nut production).

Nuts can be planted with husks, but are easier to handle and sort for viability if husks are removed. Collect nuts as soon as they fall and immediately remove husks using one of these methods:

- Place nuts in a bucket of water to soften and then peel the husks by hand.
- Place nuts in a hand-operated corn sheller.
- Place nuts in a small cement mixer along with gravel, cover with water, and rotate for 20 to 30 minutes.

Wear clothing and gloves for protection from stain in the husks. After removing husks, rinse nuts in water. Discard nuts that float; nuts that sink have full kernels and are more likely to germinate.

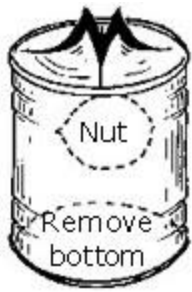


Figure 3. Tin can seed protector. Be careful – the ends and edges are very sharp!

Walnut seeds require stratification (cold treatment) before they will germinate. Small quantities of nuts can be stratified in a plastic bag in a refrigerator at 34 to 41°F for 90 to 120 days. To stratify large numbers of walnuts for spring planting, dig a pit, spread out the nuts, and cover them with 1 to 2 feet of sand, leaves, or mulch. Cover the pit with screening to keep out rodents.

When the ground thaws in spring, dig up the nuts and plant 1 to 2 inches deep in the prepared site. Plant two nuts at each planting spot. About half the nuts will germinate in four to five weeks. Additional nuts may germinate the following year. Remove excess seedlings to allow adequate growing space.

To reduce predation by squirrels and other rodents, plant nuts in the spring in an open field at least 330 feet from a woodland. When nuts will be planted within 330 feet of a woodlot with squirrels, some form of protection may be needed. Tin (not aluminum) food cans, such as soup cans, may be used to protect small plantings. Burn the cans so they will rust and disintegrate within a few years. Remove one end of each can and cut an X into the other using a chisel. Pry up the cut ends as shown in Figure 3.

Grasping the can with the open end up, place 1 to 2 inches of soil into the can, drop in a walnut, then fill the can with soil. Plant the entire can with the sharp points facing up and buried about 1 inch below the soil surface. A seedling will grow out of the can.