

# Nut Trees for the Northwest Garden

Nuts can be a wonderful addition to the home orchard or garden. Most varieties of nut trees that thrive in the maritime climate get large, though, and most require at least two cultivars for good nut set. But if you have the room, nut trees can provide decades of protein-rich nuts for your enjoyment. That is, if you can beat the squirrels and jays to the harvest!

## Hazelnuts (Filberts)



*Green hazelnuts*

Hazelnuts are the easiest nut to grow throughout the region. Hazelnuts are small, shrubby trees that usually stay under 15' in height. At least 2 different varieties must be planted for pollination, with a spacing of 15'-20'. Grow your hazelnut trees as open vase trees. Hazelnuts will start bearing nuts 2-3 years after planting.

Hazelnuts are fairly soil tolerant, needing average soil to thrive. They will grow on heavier soils than most nut trees, but are not summer drought tolerant if planted where the soils are winter wet, as they will develop a shallow root system.

Pruning on hazelnuts is relatively simple. 1) Remove suckers from the base of the tree

annually as a single trunk makes gathering the nuts easier. 2) Remove older horizontal or downward pointing wood to renew nut bearing branching. 3) Remove branches to keep the center of the tree open to air and light. 4) Remove any diseased wood.

Hazelnuts have one main disease issue in our climate, Eastern Filbert Blight. This canker disease is particularly difficult to control on older, blight susceptible varieties like Ennis. On well-established trees, blight can be pruned out, but it is often better to replace susceptible varieties with newer blight resistant cultivars. Even resistant cultivars should be sprayed with copper at bud break when young.

**Harvest.** When the nut husks turn from green to yellowish and start to drop, the hazelnuts are ripe. Gather the nuts as they drop. Remove the husks. Spread the nuts out in a warm, dry area to cure for a month before eating.

Watch for jays or squirrels showing interest in your trees. If the hazelnuts can turn inside the husks, you can pick them instead of letting them drop.



*Husked and cured hazelnuts*

## Walnuts



*Green walnuts on the tree*

English (or Persian) walnuts are large trees that bear excellent nuts. Growing to 40' high and 40' wide, they do require space to thrive. Space 20' apart at planting. Most are partially self-fertile, but set much larger crops and bear earlier if planted with a second cultivar as a pollinizer. Without a pollinizer, it may take 10-15 years for trees to come into bearing. With a pollinizer, you can expect to start seeing nuts at 6-7 years after planting.

Walnuts require deep, well-drained soils. They develop a tap root, and do not grow well on shallow or wet soils. Once established, walnuts are fairly drought resistant.

Pruning on walnuts is to develop an open form that allows air and light into the crown of the tree. At planting, head (cut back) the tree at about 5' if it is tall enough to do this. This will start branches forming at about 4 ½'. If the tree is shorter at planting, do not head it back. As shoots grow the first summer, pinch the tips out at 15"-18". These shoots are then thinned in the following year to form your scaffolds. In

following years, most pruning is done to keep the canopy open to light and air flow, and to remove crossing or dead branches.

Walnuts can bleed sap profusely when they are pruned. The timing for dormant pruning should be early to mid-winter, and summer pinching and thinning can be done in mid-summer.

One occasional walnut pest in our area is walnut husk fly. If it becomes a problem, monitoring and targeted spraying is the solution. There is also an occasional disease, walnut blight, that can damage the nuts. It is most common in springs that have rain during bloom. Copper sprays at bud break can control this disease.

**Harvest.** Nuts drop at ripe stage. The green husk will be split on ripe nuts. Remove the husks (wear gloves). Wash the nuts, then lay them out on screens or racks to dry in a warm, dry place. Black walnuts, butternut, heartnut and buartnut are all related, large-growing nut trees in the same genus as English walnuts. They can be grown here, but their nuts are often smaller and

much harder to crack than thin-shelled English walnuts. Black walnut has been grown locally for wood production, and is more wet tolerant than English walnut.



*Cascade walnuts*

## Almonds



*Prima Almond on the tree*

For many years, almonds that were hardy enough for our area were peach-almond hybrids. In the last decade, some true almond cultivars from the Nikita Botanical Garden in the Ukraine have been introduced into the Northwest and are proving hardy enough for us. These almonds are late blooming and leaf curl resistant. Like peaches, they do best where there is not frequent late frosts. Partially self-fertile, these produce bigger crops if more than one cultivar is planted. They need well drained soil and are not summer drought tolerant. Expect to start seeing nuts 5-7 years after planting.

Almonds will grow to 15'-20' and should be spaced a minimum of 15' apart. They are pruned to open vase shaped trees. Young trees should be thinned to 3 or 4 scaffold branches. In

subsequent years, use thinning cuts to remove crossing branches, and to keep the center of the tree open to light. Favor branches to minimize narrow crotch angles. After the tree comes into bearing, pruning is limited to removing dead, crossing, or diseased wood.

Disease management for almonds is much the same as it is for peaches and other stone fruit. Copper sprays applied at flower swell and petal fall can help control brown rot and bacterial canker.

**Harvest.** Almonds ripen in October and will start to fall when ripe. Shake the nuts from the tree. Remove the husks and spread on screens or trays to dry.

## Chestnuts

Chestnuts are another nut that will grow in our maritime climate. Young trees sometimes are difficult to establish, but once established are relatively easy. Chestnuts grow to be large trees, 40'-60' high and wide, and require deep, well-drained soils. For good nut set, at least 2 genetically different trees should be planted, i.e., 2 different seedling trees, or 2 different cultivars of grafted trees.

Because our region does not have chestnut blight, American chestnuts can be planted here. Chinese, Japanese, and European hybrids also do well. Plant at least 2 different chestnuts a minimum of 25' apart. Chestnuts are mostly wind pollinated, so trees should be within 200' of each other.

Chestnuts are grown to an open vase shaped tree. Most pruning is to remove dead, crossing or diseased branches, and to keep the tree open to light.

Chestnuts develop their nuts inside spiny burr husks, which will drop when the nuts are ripe. Remove the nuts from the husks and dry in a warm location. Once dry, store the nuts below 40°F. Chestnuts do not keep as well as other nut types.