

Nutty in Nebraska

By: Pam Bergstrom, Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District Forester

Have I mentioned that I am a nut grower? Wow, that came out weird and before I get strange emails and for you to stop re-reading that previous statement, let me explain. Here in Nebraska, we have groups such as the Nebraska Corn Growers Association and Nebraska Soybean Board, but we also have a group that emphasizes on Nebraskans who raise Black Walnuts, English Walnuts, Hickories, Pecans, Hazelnuts, and Chestnuts. This group is called the Nebraska Nut Growers Association. This association helps producers understand what varieties of the previously mentioned trees and shrubs that will do well in Nebraska, assist with training on how to graft cultivars not native onto our native stock, and how to market their wares. So, it's basically an Agricultural Co-op, but it focuses on nontraditional agriculture crops.

First thing people think of when Black Walnuts are mentioned is the wood and to some people, the wood is a second cash crop with the first being the nuts. For many walnut farmers, collecting the nuts while the tree is still growing is an easy way to offset costs such as pruning and land taxes. As the tree continues to grow, the number of nuts collected increases and the density of the trees also increases until it is at the right size for timber harvesting. Pecans and Hickories are the same way; the nuts are harvested while the tree reaches the ultimate size. The difference is Black Walnut starts producing walnuts at a younger age, around 8 – 10 years of age while Pecans and Hickories will start producing around 12 – 18 years of age.

Hazelnuts are becoming popular with landowners who want wildlife habitat, but others are finding the value of the nut itself. Hazelnut coffee is a favorite for several people and even crushing the hazelnuts up and putting them into a granola bar or sprinkling on top of a dessert. With the hazelnut

being more of a shrub than a tree, I have found landowners enjoy putting them close to their homes or alongside their gardens to act as a hedge.

Science has also been used by the Nebraska Nut Growers Association in order that the next generation of crop producing trees or shrubs produce the most nut meat, enhance the taste of the nut meat, and also generate a shell that is easier to cracker. Through the course of time, varieties or cultivars of nut bearing trees and shrubs have surfaced that are adapted to the extreme climate of Nebraska and also won over more and more new consumers with the taste tests of some of the finest nuts produced in America. So again, this is similar to the other ag based Co-ops in Nebraska where revenue from the sale of the goods is invested into research projects, educational materials for members, and also outreach programs to inform the public. If you have Facebook, search them and become friends and for more information or even take a look at their website:

<http://www.nebraskanutgrowers.org> .

Alongside the Nebraska Nut Growers Association, tucked in the small town of Valparaiso, Nebraska is Heartland Nuts 'N More where the crop is packaged and sold to the public. Often referred to as "The Nut House," this quant store sells everything from walnuts still in the shells, shelled out walnut or pecans, BBQ smocking packs that are full of hickory or pecan flavors to help you smoke your own meats, walnut shell hand cleaner, and even walnut flavored honey.

And, while at Heartland Nuts 'N More, take a trip through the Nutcracker Museum that will take you through the early days of nut cracking and bring you up to the present time with some unconventional nutcrackers. It is free and opened to the public! Check out their website at

<http://www.heartlandnutsnmore.com> .

Hopefully you have learned a little bit about this one of a kind Co-op and you are not coming away from this article with 'nut'thing. On a serious note, the next time you are trying to think of something for that hard to buy for person, go out on a limb and purchase something that is Nebraskan

Grown and you know the quality will be superb. Think of what you can get through the Nebraska Nut Growers Association or Heartland Nuts 'N More. And remember, we are all a little nutty.



**Nebraska
Nut Growers
Association**



Photo courtesy of www.Nebraskanutgrowers.org



Hazelnuts. Photo courtesy of www.smallfarms.cornell.edu