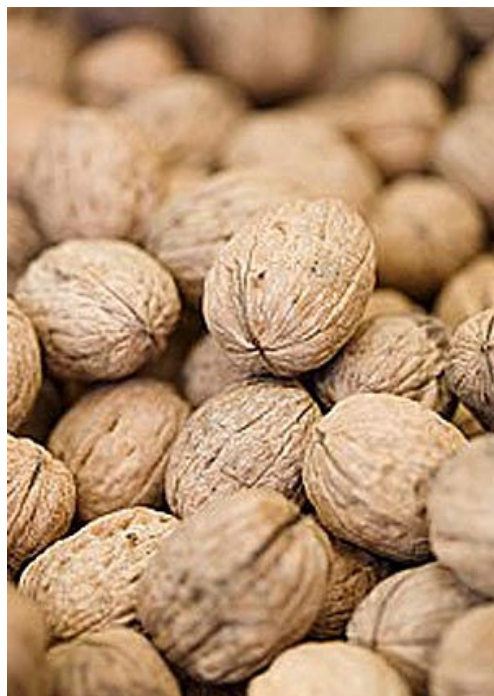


Los Angeles Times FOOD

Walnuts: How to choose, store and prepare



Walnuts (Lew Robertson / Getty Images)

They seem easy to overlook -- how special can a nut be? -- but every fall I look forward to the new crop of walnuts. Get them now, before the holidays, when the meat is sweet and slightly creamy and they haven't had a chance to develop any sour rancidity. The shells will be fragile enough to crack with your hands.

How to choose: Walnuts that are already shelled are convenient, but be aware that they do go rancid fairly quickly. Choose nutmeats that are plump and pale; avoid any that are shriveled or discolored. For whole nuts, avoid any where the shell shows signs of mold.

How to store: Whole nuts can be stored at room temperature for several weeks. Shelled nuts must be refrigerated immediately. Even better: Freeze them in a tightly sealed bag and they'll last for up to a year.

How to prepare: A basket of Bartlett pears, a plate of cheese and a mound of walnuts are as good a dessert as anyone can hope for.