

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 32

Nut Trees

Common Types

The most common nut trees grown in Ontario are heartnut, hazelnut, sweet chestnut, black walnut, Persian walnut, butternut, ginkgo, northern pecan, hican (a cross between a hickory and a pecan), shagbark hickory, shellbark hickory, nut pines, and almond.

Of the mentioned nut trees, the beaked hazel, sweet chestnut, black walnut, butternut, shagbark hickory and shellbark hickory are native to Ontario.

Production

Production rate should be considered when choosing a tree. The orchard trees must produce an annual crop with few blanks (empty nuts), and the nuts should fall cleanly from the husks.

A tree that bears many nuts but can't measure up to premium nut size is no better than a low-production tree. A good selection should be early ripening and resistant to blight (a common disease in nut trees).

Harvesting

At harvest time, many methods may be considered. For the average hobby grower, waiting for the nuts to fall and then picking them off the ground may be acceptable. For the large grower with a profit to consider, this method may be too time consuming. Instead, rakes, blower vacuums and soup cans nailed to sticks can increase the rate of nut gathering.

Nut Processing

All nuts, with the exception of chestnuts, have a hard shell that will shatter under

pressure. A machine similar to one used in a grain mill does the cracking.

The nuts are first sized through screens, then dried to no more than 10% moisture. Next, they are put through the cracker, where the nut and shell are divided by air pressure. The shells are discarded, and the nuts are ready for consumption.

Potential Benefits

Nut trees produce a product with low saturated fat and high protein. This food may substitute for meat or other animal products.

Nut trees can produce a crop on land that is too steep or rough for field crops. The amount of fossil fuels needed to produce crop systems for plowing, cultivating, and spraying are not needed in the production of nut trees. The result is lower demand for land used for production of livestock.

Culture

Most nut trees prefer to grow in a well-watered, well-drained soil. One should consider putting in drainage tiles to reduce the chance of root rotting. Most nut trees are shallow-rooted and prefer a sandy to clay loam soil. However, some trees such as the black walnut and the butternut have adapted to dry prairie conditions. If there is a drought lasting longer than six weeks, irrigation systems should be installed.

Nut trees will grow in partial shade but prefer full sun.

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