

2002

When Should I Harvest My English Walnuts, and What is the Best Way to Remove the Skins?

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Recommended Citation

Hatch, Tony, "When Should I Harvest My English Walnuts, and What is the Best Way to Remove the Skins?" (2002). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 390.

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A weekly question/answer column

**When Should I Harvest My English
Walnuts, And What Is The Best Way To
Remove The Skins?**

Tony Hatch answers:*

In a “nutshell” walnuts are ready when they can be shaken from the tree. The husks generally crack and let the walnut fall to the ground. Under hot climates, the kernel matures before the husk splits. You should routinely crack a few nuts as harvest time approaches in order to not miss the harvesting date.

- When the kernels have filled, they can be shaken from the tree. The nuts should be gathered, hulled, washed and dried as soon as possible. If left on the ground, mildews and insects will take charge.
- Walnuts can be successfully stored in gunny sacks hanging on nails in the garage or basement. The atmosphere should be dry and cool.
- Sometimes the hulls turn black and are difficult to remove. These are called “sticktight” hulls. They stick very tightly to the seed and usually have to be removed with steel brushes.
- In Utah “sticktight” are primarily caused by the walnut husk flies. The female lays her eggs in the hulls in early August. For prevention the adults need to be killed before they mate as the eggs are protected by the hulls.

We are past the target date to prevent “sticktight” this season. As pesticide availability changes almost daily, no chemical controls are suggested here. To prevent the problem next season, refer to a current pesticide update that recommends chemicals that can be used to control the walnut husk fly.

* Tony Hatch is Utah State University Extension State Fruit Specialist