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GARDEN NOTES

SOMETIMES YOU FEEL LIKE A NUT - WALNUTS

By Dennis Hinkamp

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"One of the most beautiful trees is the walnut," Says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. "A walk through a mature walnut grove gives me a feeling of reverence, a little like an old European cathedral."

Several types of walnuts can grow in the Intermountain area, he says. The most popular is the English or Persian walnut (Juglans regia). Mature trees produce an abundance of large, flavorful nuts.

Although there are many varieties of English walnuts, most grown in Utah are not named varieties, but simply seedling trees called Carpathian English walnuts, Goodspeed explains. Carpathian walnuts originated in the Carpathian Mountains of Eastern Europe and are the hardiest of the English walnuts.

Black walnuts (Juglans nigra) are native to the Eastern United States and also grow well in our area, he says. There are a few differences between English and black. The black walnut has a dark colored bark and the English is light. The black has a hardy, tolerant root system, while the English is less sturdy and more susceptible to root rot.

The biggest difference between these two varieties is the nut, he adds. The English walnut is known for having a soft and relatively thin shell. The powdery black outer shell of the black walnut stains the hands of anyone attempting to remove it. Though more difficult to extract, the meat of black walnuts is every bit as good, if not better, than the English.

English walnuts are relatively fast growing trees, Goodspeed says. They can reach a height of more than 60 feet with a similar spread. This makes them almost too large for many smaller landscapes. If the nuts are not harvested every fall, these trees can be classified as messy.

All walnut trees like deep, well-drained soil, he explains. They require little, if any, fertilization, and should be watered deeply and infrequently. They are susceptible to crown rot when the crown or base of the trunk is kept wet or moist.

"Walnut trees have both male and female flowers on the same tree," Goodspeed says. "Normally, the male flowers emerge first, followed by the female. When the tree is young, the two flowers often bloom at different times. As the tree matures, the flowers figure out this pollination situation, bloom together and produce nuts.

"Commercial operations shake the trees to harvest the nuts, as the husks start to split or become loose around the shell of the nut. It is a little difficult for most people who are not pro wrestlers to shake the tree enough to loosen the nuts."

Once the nuts are on the ground, remove the outer husks, then leave the nuts in their shells in the sun for several days to dry, Goodspeed suggests. If rain is forecast, move the nuts indoors to dry. Once they are dry, store them in a cool, dry location.

Along with squirrels, another aggravating pest for this tree is the walnut husk fly, he says. This small fly lays eggs on the husks in August. The eggs hatch and the larva bore into the husks and around the shell. Although the larva does not damage the fruit or bore into the shell, it brings a fungus with it that deteriorates the husk making it difficult to remove. It also discolors the shell.

Walnut trees just intended for shade, where the nuts are considered a nuisance, can be sprayed with a product called Florel, Goodspeed says. Applied to the tree as it blooms in the spring, it removes most of the blossoms and prevents the tree from producing nuts.

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