



© ROUGHWAY FARM

# GROW YOUR OWN NUT BUTTER



© ROUGHWAY FARM



© POTASH FARM/ALEXANDER HUNT

We're celebrating National Nut Day on 22 October by showing you how you can grow your own nut trees – and make some deliciously nutty recipes.

When farmer John Cannon was seven years old, he and his mother would head out into their hazelnut orchard at lunchtimes rather than hit the shops for food. 'We had a plantation of cobnut trees and would regularly pick a fresh crop to eat,' recalls John, now 87, who has spent the last 50 years farming 35 acres of Kentish cobnuts at Roughway Farm in Tonbridge, Kent. 'An apple, a slice of cheese and a cobnut was considered a proper meal in those days, and I always remember my first experience of that lovely crunchy, milky cobnut flavour.'

At the family farm, John – president of the Kent Cobnuts Association – and his son Giles help to harvest 70–90 tonnes of these

cultivated hazelnuts by hand every year, and the farm is home to the 'National Collection'. Indeed, cobnut trees – which are slightly broader and longer than the more familiar hazelnuts – grow extremely well in our UK climate and, being fairly compact, make a great tree for a small garden. If you have the space, it's even possible to grow walnut and almond trees in the UK too. In fact, a ready supply of homemade nut butter might not be such a hard nut to crack.

## A little nut tree

Hazels, which include cobnuts and filberts, are probably the easiest nut trees to grow at home. Uniquely in the UK, the nut is eaten at multiple stages: moist and fresh straight after picking in late August and September, when they have the texture of a sweet chestnut, and later in autumn as they turn brown and become much sweeter.

The trees don't require any special conditions and don't grow too tall. John recommends 'Kent Cob', 'Gunslebert' or 'Ennis' – 'a large nut, that looks fabulous in the fruit bowl' – and planting from mid-October to April. Dig a hole one and a half times the width and depth of the root system, plant the tree, back fill and firm in. Young trees will need staking for a few years, and will produce fruit in around three years from planting. 'Give them a bit of space and a weed-free area around the base, and prune back the suckers [small shoots] that grow from the base,' advises John.

Alexander Hunt from Potash Farm in St Mary's Platt even recommends containers. 'They'll do well in good-sized pots for four to five years,' he says. As well as 15 acres of cobnuts, Alexander also cares for five acres of walnuts at his farm, producing seven tonnes of the nuts every year. Though they grow large – up to the size of a house if happily situated – like cobnuts they need minimal care. 'Walnuts are a real statement tree and their leaves smell of oranges and lemons. I recommend a modern variety such as 'Lara', 'Franquette' or 'Broadview', which take just a few years to establish,' says Alexander. 'They'll need minimal pruning and

### ABOUT ALICE

Alice Whitehead is a writer who loves to grow, eat and get muddy. For 20 years she has written garden and food features for magazines and newspapers, and more recently split her time between tending two large, city allotment plots and a school garden club. She still hasn't decided whether she prefers the pen or the spade. Follow Alice on Twitter @allotmentalice.



PORTRAIT PHOTO © ALICE WHITEHEAD



Alexander Hunt picking cobnuts at Potash Farm

© POTASH FARM/ALEXANDER HUNT



Walnut trees look beautiful and need minimal care

© POTASH FARM/ALEXANDER HUNT

are very hardy and disease-resistant. You can be picking from mid-October until the end of November.'

**Taste of California**

While we might not have the wall-to-wall sunshine of the Golden State, with our warming climate it is possible to grow almond trees in the UK too. A relative of the peach, they grow best against a sunny south-facing wall – but need protection from frosts.

'Pollination can be a nuisance in our springs,' says Mark Diacono, former head gardener at River Cottage, who grows exotics such as Szechuan pepper, Chilean guava and over 60 almond trees at his organic smallholding, Otter Farm, in Devon. 'They need a nice sheltered spot and a good summer so they can build up their resilience for winter. It will be three years before they really start producing well.'

Fruits, which appear in October, are naturally engineered with built-in crash barriers and the edible seed is housed inside a hard wooden shell, rather like a peach pip, which is then encased in a thick, leathery, grey-green hull with a downy exterior. Plants grafted onto a dwarfing rootstock (such as 'St Julian A') work best, and the trees need to be set slightly away from a wall or fence so they can soak up the rain. Use horizontal wires at 30cm intervals to train the branches.

'You can't beat fresh almonds,' affirms Mark. 'They are brighter, livelier and crunchier than imported types.' Other nut growers are similarly effusive about their homegrown crops. Low maintenance and easy to grow, they can provide baskets of



© POTASH FARM/ALEXANDER HUNT

nuts in the right location, and are packed with vitamins, minerals and healthy monounsaturated fats. 'Picked fresh, English cobnuts in particular are full of moisture; crunchy, succulent, with a mild chestnut flavour that's great dipped in salt with a glass of sherry,' says Alexander. 'Food miles are a real issue and demand for locally grown food like this is definitely here to stay.'

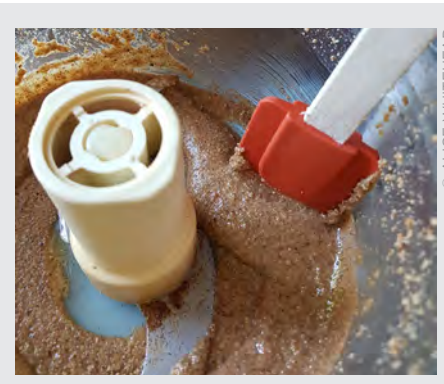
● Pot-grown walnut, cobnut and almond trees are available from [www.walnuttrees.co.uk](http://www.walnuttrees.co.uk) and [www.kentishcobnuts.com](http://www.kentishcobnuts.com).



**TOTALLY NUTS!** Roughway Farm is offering a 10% discount to *Vegetarian Living* readers on all cobnuts up until 15 December 2018. This includes early fresh green cobnuts and the sweeter dehusked cobnut gift bags, ideal for Christmas. To order, go to [roughwayfarm.co.uk](http://roughwayfarm.co.uk) and use VLC0B10 at the checkout to activate the offer.



© ROUGHWAY FARM



© ALICE WHITEHEAD

**How to make roasted nut butter**

Preheat the oven to 190C/fan 170C/gas 5. Spread 300g hazelnuts or almonds onto a baking tray and roast for 10 minutes. Allow them to cool, then whizz in a food processor for about 10 minutes until they form a smooth paste. Add honey or salt to taste – or pep up with a handful of seeds, or cocoa powder for nutty chocolate spread! It can be stored in the fridge for a few weeks.



© POTASH FARM/ALEXANDER HUNT

**Potash Farm's spicy walnut savouries**

Rub 75g diced butter into 110g flour until it takes on the texture of breadcrumbs. Add 2 tablespoons of walnuts and 110g strong vegetarian Cheddar and mix. Stir in 1 tablespoon of wholegrain mustard and press the dough together. Add a little water if it seems too dry. Form into a roll and wrap in cling film or foil. This can be stored in the fridge for a day or two and quickly baked when needed, or it can be frozen. Before baking, brush the roll with milk and roll in sesame seeds. Slice into rounds and bake on a greased baking sheet at 180C/fan 160C/gas 4 until golden.

© ROUGHWAY FARM



## Roughway Farm's Kent cobnut and cranberry biscotti

Makes 10 biscotti | Prep 10 mins  
Cook 55 mins

110g plain flour  
¾ tsp baking powder  
pinch of mixed spice  
75g caster sugar  
pinch of salt  
1 large free-range egg, beaten  
few drops of vanilla extract  
50g cobnuts, untoasted, skin on  
25g dried cranberries

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4 and grease a baking sheet.
  - 2 Place all the ingredients into a bowl and work the dough together, adding a drop of milk if necessary. Tip the dough onto a floured surface and shape into a long, fat sausage about 25cm in length, catching any escapee nuts or cranberries and poking them back into the mixture.
  - 3 Put the dough onto the prepared baking tray and bake for about 30 minutes, until slightly golden. Remove from the oven and cool on a rack.
  - 4 Once cold, use a serrated bread knife to cut into diagonal slices around 1cm wide. Place flat-side down on a baking sheet and re-cook at 150C/fan 130C/gas 2 for 25 minutes, until crisp and golden. Remove and allow to cool. Store in an airtight tin or container.
- PER BISCIOTTI 120 cal, fat 4g, sat fat 0g, carbs 18g, sugars 9g, protein 3g, salt 0.21g, fibre 1g



© MARTIN POOLE

## Orecchiette with walnut pesto and broccoli

This version of pesto uses pre-toasted walnuts instead of pine nuts, giving the sauce a robust bitterness.

Serves 4 | Prep 10 mins | Cook 20 mins

150g walnut halves  
1 small clove garlic, peeled  
pinch of sea salt flakes  
200g basil leaves  
100–120ml olive oil  
35g vegetarian pecorino, finely grated, plus extra to serve  
400g dried orecchiette  
400g tenderstem broccoli

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4. Spread the walnuts out on a roasting tray and roast for 10 minutes. Tip out onto a clean tea towel and use it to rub the nuts and gently remove the skins. Don't worry about being too fastidious; as long as some of the skins are removed, the pesto won't taste too bitter.
- 2 Pulse the garlic, salt and two-thirds of the walnuts in a food processor to a rough crumb consistency. Throw in the basil leaves and oil, then blend to a smooth paste. Stir in the cheese and taste, adding a

little more salt if you feel the need.

- 3 Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil, add the orecchiette and cook according to the packet instructions.
  - 4 While the pasta is cooking, separate the broccoli stalks from the heads and then thinly slice. Add the sliced broccoli stalks to the pan 3 minutes before the pasta is ready, then the broccoli heads for the final 2 minutes of cooking. Drain and tip the pasta and broccoli into a large, warmed bowl, add the pesto and toss to coat.
  - 5 To serve, divide the pasta mixture between four warmed serving bowls, crush the remaining walnuts over the top and finish with a little grated pecorino.
- PER SERVING 786 cal, fat 35g, sat fat 6g, carbs 83g, sugars 7g, protein 29g, salt 0.69g, fibre 11g



Recipe adapted from *Root & Leaf* by Rich Harris (Kyle Books, £19.99). Photography by Martin Poole.