

Pistachios.....

The Other Nuts Should be Green with Envy

By John Rizzo

There is archeological evidence dating all the way back to 6750 BC, that pistachio nuts were harvested as food in the Middle East. Although native to countries such as Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon, pistachios have become a very lucrative crop for California growers. It was first brought to California in 1854, but really didn't begin to be commercially produced there until 1970. Prior to this, the United States was fully dependent on The Middle East, mainly Iran, for pistachio nuts. In 1976, during the hostage crisis in Iran, sanctions were imposed on Iranian exports which boosted the development and sales of domestic product. Today, nearly all pistachios found in the United States are domestically grown.

Its unusual green color is completely natural and is very appealing in many dishes, especially desserts. The deeper the color, the better the quality, which consequently brings the higher price.

Harvesting takes place in late summer and early fall where large tarps are placed under the trees which are shaken until the ripe nuts fall. The shells split while on the trees and are later soaked in brine and then sun dried; this process opens the shells even wider.

Now you know I can't tell you interesting facts about anything without pointing out the nutritional value. Pistachios are rich in phytosterols which aid in the lowering of blood cholesterol and may have the ability to fight cancer. In fact, Studies have shown that eating nuts can play a role in lowering coronary heart disease by decreasing total and LDL cholesterol levels. They are a great source of potassium; one ounce of pistachios contains as much potassium as an orange. This is more than any other nut. They are also rich in vitamin C, magnesium, calcium, iron and protein.

If you purchase a large quantity of nuts, you will find it beneficial to freeze them in heavy freezer bags where they will keep for several months. They can also be refrigerated up to six weeks. If they lose their natural crispness, they can be revived by heating them in a 250° F oven for approximately 8-9 minutes.

You may find it interesting to know that pistachio nuts are in the same family as the mango, cashew, sumac, poison ivy and poison oak; although much tastier than the latter.

And now the tip of the day: To open those tough nuts, use an empty shell to pry them open.

Pistachio Cake

Yellow Cake Mix	1 box
Water	3/4 Cup
Salad Oil	3/4 Cup
Eggs	4
Green Food Color (optional)	2 drops
Pistachio Instant Pudding	1 box
Walnuts, Chopped Fine	1 1/3 Cups
Sugar	4 tsp.
Cinnamon	1 1/3 tsp

Combine the cake mix, water, oil, eggs, food color, and pudding; using an electric mixer; whip the ingredients until smooth.

Meanwhile, combine the nuts, sugar and cinnamon; blend well.

Pour half of the batter into a greased and floured tube (bundt™ pan). Sprinkle half the nut topping over the batter and pour the rest of the batter over the nuts. Sprinkle the remaining topping over the batter. Bake at 350° F for approximately 50 minutes or until an inserted toothpick pulls out clean.