

New Mexico is proud of its production of high-quality chile and pecans. In 2014, New Mexico produced 58,700 tons of chile and 33,500 tons of pecans (USDA–NASS, 2014). This publication gives information on these New Mexico favorites, as well as recipes that highlight these delicious foods.

HISTORY

When Don Juan de Oñate entered New Mexico in 1598, he brought with him many crops—including chile—that were native to Mexico but that were unknown in the upper Rio Grande Valley. Many landrace chile varieties, such as Chimayó, are descended from the chiles brought by Oñate (Office of the State Historian, n.d.).

Today, most chile grown in New Mexico is of the “New Mexican” pod type, which was developed by Fabián García at New Mexico State University. García bred native chiles to produce varieties that had attributes better suited to commercial production, like a larger fruit size and uniform heat level (Coon et al., 2008).

Pecan trees are native to the central and southern United States and parts of Mexico (Manaster, 1994). Native Americans enjoyed pecans before the Europeans came to North America. The word pecan is Algonquian and means “a nut too hard to crack by hand” (Manaster, 1994). The first Spanish and French explorers mentioned the native nuts growing in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were among the pioneers in pecan culture; they recorded attempts to grow pecans from seed, and planted the trees in their home gardens (Manaster, 1994). As early as 1932, observations were made that the southern Rio Grande Valley would be ideal for pecan orchards. Pecan orchards in the Pecos Valley started shortly after 1900.

RICH IN NUTRIENTS

Chile is rich in vitamins A and C. Vitamin A is most abundant in fresh red peppers in the form of carotene. Most of the vitamin A in chile remains after it is



canned, dried, or frozen, which is important because of the many processed chile products available. Vitamin C content of chile increases as the season advances and is higher in chile gathered in October than in August. Because vitamin C is affected by heat and oxidation, canned and frozen chile contain slightly less vitamin C than fresh chile. Chile loses vitamin C when dried.

Pecans provide calcium, phosphorus, iron, potassium, and magnesium. They are also a good source of the B vitamins thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin. Ten large nuts (20 halves) provide approximately 100 calories. The fat in pecans has a high ratio of polyunsaturated to saturated fatty acids. The pecan is an excellent source of energy because it is 71% fat.

SELECTING AND STORING

Chile

Chile may be either green or red, and is available fresh, dried, frozen, or canned.

Fresh chile pods should be large, smooth, firm, and thick-fleshed, with smooth shoulders and a bright, shiny surface. Roasted and peeled green chile can be dried in the sun or in a home dehydrator.

Traditionally, red chile is strung in ristras and dried in the sun for winter use. See NMSU Extension Guide

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E-327, *Using Chile to Make Ristras and Chile Sauce* (http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_e/E327.pdf), to learn how to make your own ristra. Dried chile is marketed as whole pods or ground powder.

Frozen green chile is available in many forms—whole chiles, chopped chiles, sauces, and many prepared dishes. Frozen red chile sauce is available as well for enchiladas, chile con carne, and burritos. A wide variety of canned products containing chile has made this popular New Mexico crop available to chile fans across the country.

For storage, put fresh chile in plastic zip-top bags in the refrigerator until peeled. Dried red chile or chile powder should be stored in a cool, dark place to preserve flavor and color. Frozen foods should be stored at or below 0°F. Canned chile should be stored in a cool, dark place. Refrigerate cans after opening and use within 2 days.

Pecans

Pecans are available shelled or in the shell. Fresh shelled pecans are a light golden brown; the color darkens with age. High-quality pecans in the shell are clean and free from cracks or holes. Unshelled pecans will keep at room temperature for about 6 months. Ideally they should be stored in a cool, dry place. Shelled pecans should be stored in a refrigerator or the freezer. They remain in good condition for a year.

ADD CHILES AND PECANS TO YOUR FAVORITE DISHES

Both chile and pecans add good flavor to a wide variety of dishes. Chile in all forms should be labeled for its pungency or heat level. Sometimes variety is used as an indication of hotness, so it is helpful for novices to be familiar with varieties. See NMSU Research Report 763, *The Chile Cultivars of New Mexico State University Released from 1913 to 2008* (<http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/research/horticulture/RR-763.pdf>), for information on chile varieties, including heat level. A little bit of chile usually goes a long way, so it's best to start with a small amount first. For hotter dishes, substitute jalapeño or serrano peppers for part or all of the green chile.

Chiles or chile sauce is essential for many Mexican recipes, such as tacos, enchiladas, or huevos rancheros. Chile can also be a tasty addition to scrambled eggs, beans, salads, casseroles, and vegetable dishes.

Pecans add tasty nourishment to every course at mealtime. They can be added to salads, casseroles, main dishes, and desserts. Better yet, just eat them plain or toasted.



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CHILE RECIPES

Red Chile Sauce

1/2 cup dry red chile powder
2 tablespoons flour
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
2 cups water
2 tablespoons cooking oil
1/2 teaspoon Mexican oregano

In a saucepan, mix chile powder, flour, salt, and garlic powder. Add water gradually while mixing to blend well. Add oil and oregano and stir to combine. Simmer gently for 15 minutes. Makes 2 cups (1 pint).

Red Enchiladas

1/4 cup cooking oil
1 dozen corn tortillas
2 cups grated cheese (such as cheddar, jack, or asadero)
1/2 cup chopped onion (optional)
1 pint red chile sauce (see recipe above)

Heat oil in a fry pan. Fry each tortilla briefly in hot oil and drain. Dip one tortilla into chile sauce, then place tortilla flat on a plate, sprinkle cheese and onion on top, and repeat. Usually 3 tortillas make one serving. May be topped with a fried egg. Serve with refried beans, Spanish rice, and/or salad. Serves 4 to 6.

Chile Con Carne

Make red chile sauce (recipe above) and add 2 cups cooked, cubed meat and 2 cups cooked pinto beans. Serve hot in bowls with corn or flour tortillas or corn bread.

New Mexico Spoon Bread

- 1 14- or 16-oz can cream style corn
- 3/4 cup milk
- 1/3 cup melted shortening
- 1 1/2 cups cornmeal
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon sugar (optional)
- 1 1/2 cups grated cheese (such as cheddar, jack, or asadero)
- 1 4-oz can chopped green chile

Preheat oven to 400°F. Mix all ingredients except chile and cheese. Pour half of the batter into a greased 9 × 9 pan, then sprinkle on half of the cheese and chile. Add the remaining batter and top with the rest of the cheese and chile. Bake for 45 minutes; cool slightly and serve.

Green Chile Salsa

- 1 cup chopped, peeled green chile (fresh, canned, or frozen)
- 1/4 cup finely chopped onion
- 3/4 cup chopped tomatoes (fresh or canned)
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon fresh cilantro (optional)

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Chill and refrigerate for an hour or longer to allow flavors to blend. This makes 2 cups (1 pint) of salsa. Serve as a dip, in tacos, with beans, or to season other foods.

Chile Con Queso

In a saucepan, cook green chile salsa (recipe above) until just tender. Remove from heat. Add 2 cups grated cheese (such as cheddar, jack, or asadero). Stir in until melted. Serve as a dip or to season bland foods. Thin with evaporated milk to desired consistency.

Green Chile Cream Cheese Spread

- 4 to 6 green chiles, roasted
- 1 16-oz package cream cheese

Peel chile, remove stems and seeds, and chop finely. Bring cream cheese to room temperature. Blend cheese and chile. Spread on celery or carrot sticks, bagels, or tortilla chips. Refrigerate leftover spread promptly.

Green Chile Stew

- 2 tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 lb beef stew meat, cubed
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 1/3 cups green chile (desired heat level; peeled, seeded, and chopped)
- 2 cups chopped tomatoes (canned or fresh)
- 3 carrots, sliced
- 3 medium potatoes, cubed
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin seed
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons flour
- Water

Heat oil in a large, heavy fry pan on medium heat. Add meat and brown. Add onion, chile, tomato, carrots, potatoes, cumin seed, salt, and pepper and mix thoroughly. Sprinkle flour over all ingredients. Add water to cover all ingredients. Cover and bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer 1 1/2 hours or until tender. Serves 6.

Quick Chile Cheese Corn

- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1/2 cup chopped green onions
- 2/3 cup chopped, peeled green chile
- 1 1/4 cups cooked tomatoes
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 20-oz can whole kernel corn (2 1/2 cups)
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheese (such as cheddar, jack, or asadero)

In a large skillet, heat butter over medium heat. Sauté onion until translucent. Add chile, tomatoes, and salt and cook until just tender. Add corn and heat to simmering. Remove from heat. Stir in shredded cheese until melted. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

PECAN RECIPES

Deviled Pecans

- 1 lb shelled pecans
- 1/2 teaspoon hot sauce
- 1/3 cup melted butter or margarine
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 300°F. Place nuts in a shallow baking pan. In a separate bowl, combine remaining ingredients, then pour over nuts and stir well. Bake 20 minutes, stirring twice during cooking. Let cool on thick paper towels. Store in airtight container.



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Western Pecan Pie

3 eggs, slightly beaten
1 cup light brown sugar
1/2 cup dark corn syrup
1/2 cup white corn syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 tablespoons melted butter
1 cup broken pecans
1 9-inch unbaked pie shell

Preheat oven to 275°F. Combine eggs and sugar. Add dark and white corn syrups, vanilla, melted butter, and pecans and stir to combine. Place in pie shell and bake for 1 1/2 hours.

Pecan Cheese Ball

2 8-oz packages cream cheese, softened
1 8.5-oz can crushed pineapple, well drained
2 cups chopped pecans
1/3 cup chopped bell pepper
2 tablespoons chopped green onion
1 tablespoon seasoned salt
Garnish (optional)

Gradually stir together softened cream cheese, crushed pineapple, 1 cup of the pecans, bell pepper, onion, and seasoned salt. Chill well. Form into a ball and roll in the remaining 1 cup of pecans. Chill until serving. Garnish with twists of pineapple slices, maraschino cherries, or parsley. Serve with assorted crackers.

Broccoli Casserole

1 lb fresh broccoli, chopped
1/4 lb grated cheddar cheese
1 cup chopped pecans
1 10-oz can cream of chicken soup
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 350°F. Cook broccoli in salted water until just tender. Drain and place in a greased 2-quart casserole dish. Add cheese and pecans. In a separate bowl, mix soup and milk, then pour over broccoli mixture. Top with bread crumbs and bake for 30 minutes.

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