

## Ingredient of the Month

# PEANUTS



Peanuts are botanically classified as legumes. Legumes are edible seeds enclosed in pods. Peanuts grow underground, as opposed to nuts like walnuts, almonds, or other nuts that grow on trees. However, for culinary, research and nutritional purposes, peanuts are considered a nut. Peanut seeds, or kernels, grow into green oval-leafed plants about 18 inches tall, which develop delicate yellow flowers around the lower portion of the plants. From planting to harvesting, the growing cycle takes four to five months, depending on the type or variety.

The peanut plant is generally thought to have originated in South America. The production of peanuts in the U.S. started to rise around the early 1900s. This can be credited to the growing popularity of peanut butter, peanut-based candies, and other peanut products, a need for more plant oils during World War I, and the research of Dr. George Washington Carver. Dr. Carver is considered by many to be the father of the peanut industry. He began his peanut research in 1903. He suggested to farmers that they rotate their cotton plants and cultivate peanuts. While cotton depletes nitrogen from the soil, peanuts, as legumes, naturally add nitrogen back into the soil.

## Healthy Ingredient Contribution

Peanut nutrition plays various roles in metabolism and health. A handful of peanuts is a good source of niacin and manganese and a good source of fiber, phosphorus, vitamin E, folate, copper, and magnesium. Since the protein in peanuts is plant-based, it carries with it additional components promoting positive health benefits like fiber and unique bioactives, unlike animal protein. Peanuts are high in arginine, an amino acid, which is one of the building blocks of protein. This amino acid is a precursor to nitric oxide, a compound that expands your blood vessels. It may help decrease

blood pressure and reduce heart disease risk. Over a third of the carbohydrates in peanuts are fiber. Fiber is beneficial to many body functions including contributing to lower levels of total and “bad” LDL cholesterol and improving digestion.

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) estimates that only 0.6 – 1.0% of Americans has peanut allergy. However, the true prevalence of food allergies is unknown. Those with a family history of allergy, asthma, or eczema, may be at increased risk.

## Types and Varieties

**VIRGINIA** Virginia peanuts are often called “cocktail nuts” and are considered large-kernelled. Their size makes them wonderful for processing to become salted peanuts, confections, and roasted in-shell.

**RUNNER** Runner peanuts are the most widely consumed peanut variety. They’re full of delicious flavor, great roasting characteristics, and high yields. Runner’s medium size makes them the first choice of producers for use in peanut butters.

**VALENCIA** Valencia peanuts are a sweet type of peanut that are covered by a bright red skin and usually contain three or more kernels in a longer shell. They are mostly served as roasted peanuts and sold in their peanut shell or boiled.

**SPANISH** Spanish peanuts are identifiable by their smaller kernels and their reddish-brown skin. They are used mostly in peanut candies, peanut and nut snacks, and peanut butter.

They also have a higher oil content than the other types, which makes them the best for extracting oil.

## Interesting Facts

- The current top three producers of peanuts are China, India, and the United States.
- In the U.S., peanuts and peanut butter are the most popular nut choice and comprise 67% of all nut consumption.
- It takes about 540 peanuts to make a 12-ounce jar of peanut butter.
- There are six cities in the U.S. named Peanut.
- It takes fewer than 5 gallons of water to produce 1 ounce of peanuts.



## Purchasing and Preparing

- **WHOLE NUTS** Whole peanuts are often eaten as a snack and can be roasted for a variety of flavors. Whole peanuts can also be added to desserts, salads, and pasta dishes for flavor and texture.
- **PEANUT OIL** Peanut oil has a pleasing and sometimes light, nutty flavor. It does not absorb the flavor of other foods cooked in the oil. Therefore, several different items can be cooked together and each will maintain their own great taste. Peanut oil is also good for deep-frying as it has a high smoke point.
- **FLOUR** Peanut flour contains 40-50% protein, and is a gluten-free and vegan alternative. In addition to replacing wheat flour in traditional recipes, peanut flour can be included in sauces and soups for texture and flavor, as a crumb topping and even blending it into smoothies and shakes to increase the flavor and protein content.
- **PEANUT BUTTER** To be classified as real peanut butter, both traditional and “natural” types must contain a minimum of 90% peanuts, with no artificial sweeteners, colors, or preservatives. For added flavor, some commercial brands may also add sugar or salt. Peanut butter is a great addition to sauces and spreads, and paired with other indulgences in rich desserts.
- **PEANUT MILK** While not as popular as other nut-milks, peanut milk is great protein-filled dairy-alternative. Peanut milk is a flavorful addition to coffee, chai teas, and smoothies.

### *The Peanut Institute*

*The Peanut Institute is a non-profit organization supporting nutrition research and developing educational programs to encourage healthful lifestyles that include peanuts and peanut products. For more information visit their website at <https://peanut-institute.com>.*

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