

Black Walnut is perhaps the most misunderstood native tree in the northeast. It seems that almost everyone knows a *little* about it, but very few people have truly been exposed to it. If you were to ask the average person about them, you are likely to get one or more of the following responses:

“You can eat it, but it's an insane amount of work”

“It kills anything planted near it”

“If you touch them it'll stain your hands black”

“It's good wood”

With the exception of having high quality wood, these are all half-truths. Too often Black Walnut gets a negative reputation as a tree that litters lawns with its “useless” nuts and that poisons gardens. If you have one, you may have been tempted to cut it down. The purpose of this pamphlet is to introduce people to ways to enjoy the tree and maybe get them to look at it in a new light.

## Eating

The most exciting feature of Black Walnut is that... it's a walnut! However, they're not like the walnuts you buy in stores or normally have in pastries. Those walnuts are a European relative that we call English Walnuts (Even though they're originally from Persia. Go figure.)

Black Walnut is also claimed to be healthier than the English Walnut. It contains high contents of fatty acids and protein, as well as those fancy-pants, heart-helping omega-3's that you hear about on the news.

Black Walnut has a much stronger flavor than those other wimpy nuts. It really will be a love or hate relationship with your taste buds. To some people it's an amazing fruity taste, but to others it tastes like lighter fluid. It's really just an indescribable taste that you'll have to try for yourself!

You may also hear claims that the nuts need to be cooked. This is misinformation. They can be eaten raw and you may actually prefer them that way! Cooking the nuts will make them taste much more mild and they can be used in baked goods the same way as “normal” walnuts.

## How to get to the Nut

Here's the meat of this pamphlet. Black Walnuts have a legendary reputation as being a hard nut to crack. However, with fairly common tools and moderate amounts of patience, you'll find that they're not really all that bad.

The first thing to understand is that there's actually 2 layers to get through before you can eat the nut. The first is the hull and the second is the shell. (Technically, a walnut is not a true nut, and is instead called a drupe. All this means is that there is a fleshy fruit around the shell.)

**The Hull** is a green, outer fleshy layer that makes the walnut look more like a lime when it first drops off the tree. Over time, this green will change to black and being to soften. Once they turn black, touching them will stain your hands black for about 2 weeks, so wear gloves if you have an important job interview coming up!



By hand, the hulls can be cut down the center with a knife and then twisted off. In general, I have not had huge success with this method since it leaves debris stuck to the shell. I would scrub the nut afterward, as leaving too much of the hull on may taint the flavor of the inner nut over time. This process may also be undesirable to squeamish people as sometimes small maggots live in the hull as it begins to rot (But don't worry, the inside of the nut is almost always bug-free. They just like the hull). Doing this by hand is time consuming, but necessary if you want to save the hulls for dye (more on that later).

A much, much, much faster method of cleaning them involves a power-washer and a cage (I use Havahart trap). You simply put a batch of nuts in the cage, place them in an area where the ground can get messy, and blast the

hulls off by shooting them with the power-washer. Using this method you can clean over 1,000 nuts in an hour!



There are other methods of removing the hull, such as placing them in a cement mixer and letting them rub against each other until clean, but the power-washer is the one that works for me.

Once cleaned, spread them out in a dry space and allow the nuts to sit for a few weeks. Allowing them to dry will shrink the inner nut and make it easier to remove from the shell in the next step.

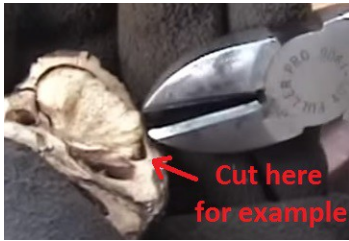
**Shelling** is the part of the process that most people claim is “too much work.” The shell of a Black Walnut is very hard and the inner part of it is a complicated 4-chamber shape, making nut meat harder to extract than the English Walnut. However, it's really not all that complex.



First get a **hard surface** and a **heavy hammer**. Simply smash the nut open. Don't swing as hard as you can as it will shatter. A few medium strength taps will crack the shell without sending it flying. Then you will need a pair of decent **wire cutters**. Clip the shell in areas that you think will free the nuts. The shell will usually split along the spot you clipped. Using the wire cutters is really



what turns this from an impossible task into no big deal.



From there you can eat them directly or store them in a jar for a few weeks. Easy as that!

### Dyes and Inks

Another fun thing to do with Black Walnut is to make dyes for clothes or natural inks to write with. Black Walnut can dye clothes to be a nice dark brown. It also does not need a mordant and you'll want to wear gloves, unless you're trying to dye your hands.

Making the dye is extremely simple. Just remove the black hulls from some walnuts (15 should be plenty for a gallon of dye) and put them in a pot of water. Boil the water and let it simmer for an hour or so. You may want to strain out some solids, and then you can dip the material to dye in the pot. Leave it in longer if you want the color darker. When you're finished, remove the material and rinse it thoroughly. You don't want excess Black Walnut rubbing onto your other clothes.



It can also make ink for dipping pens in the same way, although you may want to add a little alcohol to preserve it.

There are many more detailed recipes online, but they're all very simple. Give it a shot!

Bonus Trivia: Black Walnut was once used as a hair dye. Don't ask me how that worked. I'm sure it resulted in some stained foreheads.

### Gardens

Black Walnut secretes a substance called juglone into soil around it that prevents the growth of some plants. This leads many to spread the rumor that the tree is "poisonous" and should be removed. This is not true. Many plants are tolerant of juglone and can even use it to cut down competition.

Tolerant garden veggies include: Beans, Beets, Carrots, Corn, Melons, Onions, Parsnips, Squash, Soybeans. Bigger lists can be found online.

Juglone will affect potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, asparagus, cabbage, and eggplant, but if space is limited in your yard, you can simply make a raised bed. Just make sure to clear Black Walnut leaves from it when they start falling. Also do not use any part of black walnut in your compost if you plan to use it on these plants

### Enjoy the trees!

There's more to say about the tree than can fit in a little pamphlet, but this is meant as an introduction to what the tree can be used for. While not the rarest tree, Black Walnut is becoming more rare in New York (as are tons of other trees). Walnut also has the disadvantage of having good wood, leading more people to make use of this "bad plant." We tend to take these trees down far too readily. Hopefully as knowledge of its benefits become more mainstream, decisions to cut them down will be treated with more weight.

## UNLOCK THE MYSTERIES OF



# BLACK WALNUT