Oregon is the largest producer of filberts (hazelnuts) in the United States. Although Oregon is not a large producer of commercial walnuts, there are many backyard walnut trees and some commercial orchards making English walnuts a popular fall crop.

HARVESTING

Filberts are mature when they pop from the husk and fall to the ground. For the best quality nut, it is recommended that the nuts be picked up soon after they fall so they do not mold. This is especially important in rainy weather.

Walnuts are mature as soon as the husk cracks and the nut comes free. High quality nuts will usually fall from the husk to the ground. Walnuts tend to mold rapidly in moist weather so it is best to pick them up soon after they fall. If the nuts are blown off by the wind before the husks crack, they can be left on the ground to ripen. The nuts will ripen in a week or two and the husk can then be removed. Diseased nuts and nuts of low quality often do not release from the husk.

Wear rubber gloves when harvesting walnuts. Walnut stains are very difficult to remove from skin and clothing.

DRYING

Nuts are usually dried in the shell, but a considerable amount of drying time can be saved and less heat will be needed if the nuts are shelled before drying.

Optimum drying temperatures are 95 to 105°F. Air circulation is very important during the drying process. Dry nuts on a screen-bottom tray, in an onion sack or in other containers that will permit free air passage. Small lots can be dried in the warm airstream above a furnace or radiator or in a food dehydrator as long as the temperature does not exceed 105°F. It will usually take 3-4 days for walnuts and about 2-3 days for filberts. It is important not to dry nuts at temperatures above 110°F. because it will lower the quality of the dried nut.

Tests for dryness

Walnuts  Crack open the shell and bend the divider between the nut halves. It should break with a snap. The divider will be rubbery before the nuts are dry.
Filbert kernels are firm at the start of the drying process and then become spongy as they dry. As the nuts approach dryness, they become firm again. The internal color of the nut gradually changes from white to a creamy color, starting at the outside. When the color change reaches the center of the kernel, the nut is dry. Crack open a few nuts and carefully check both the color and texture of the nut to determine if the filberts are dry.

STORING

Nuts in the Shell Nuts can be left in the shell and stored in burlap or mesh type bags. The nuts should be stored in a cool, dry place at a temperature of 55°F or below. The greatest cause of spoilage is rancidity, mold and the Indian meal moth.

Shelled Nuts Shelled nuts become rancid much more rapidly than nuts left in the shell, so added precautions for storage need to be taken to assure a top quality product. They can be stored for a year at refrigerator temperatures of 32-35°F. They should be packaged in freezer weight bags or containers.

FREEZING

Freezing is one of the quickest and most satisfactory methods of storing nuts for long periods of time. Nuts can be frozen in the shell or shelled. Nuts frozen in the shell will take up a lot of freezer space, so it is not practical or economical.

To freeze nut meats, place nuts (whole or chopped) into freezer quality bags, freezer containers, or glass jars and store in the freezer at 0°F or lower. Thaw nuts before using.

SEALING IN JARS

Nuts which are to be stored in jars need to be heated before processing. To heat, spread dried nut meats in a shallow layer in a baking pan. Bake in a slow oven (250°F) until the nuts are dry, but not brown. The nuts should be watched carefully and stirred from time to time while they are heating so they will not scorch. Pack hot nuts into half-pint, pint, or quart canning jars leaving ½ inch headspace. Wipe rims, adjust lids and process in a water bath canner or pressure canner following the recommendations below:

Boiling Water Canner Place in a boiling water canner with the water level 1-2 inches below the tops of the jars. Process for 30 minutes.

Pressure Canner Process 10 minutes at 6 pounds pressure in a dial gauge canner or 5 pounds pressure in a weighted gauge canner.

For more information on harvesting and preserving nuts, contact your local county Extension Office.