

## *Piñon*

Nuts About Piñon? The seeds of New Mexico's official state tree, the Piñon Pine (adopted in 1949) have long sustained Native peoples and Hispanic settlers; a cultural and economic tradition going back generations. For the indigenous tribes of New Mexico, it was a staple of their diet. Usually, the nuts were gathered from the ground, but animal hides or wool blankets would also be laid out under the trees and the nuts were shaken onto them. Sometimes pack rat nests were raided, yielding several pounds. Native practice dictated that some were left for the animals, maintaining the ecosystem and ensuring a successful hunting season.

Traditionally, the nuts would be roasted on hot rocks around the fire. The flavorful nuts would be used in soups, venison stews and other delicious dishes. They were boiled, mashed, roasted, ground into flour or eaten raw as a travel snack. Today, they still add flavor to many foods. A local favorite around the holidays are empanadas (turnover pastries) with minced meat, raisins, and of course, piñon!

For many New Mexicans it is still an autumn tradition to make a day of piñon picking. Families gather along mountain roadways to collect piñon in buckets, bags, pillowcases, whatever's handy. People mine the forest floor on hands and knees, separating needle from nut (a rather arduous task). Once collected, they are sorted. Nuts are dumped into a bucket of water. Those that float are no good. The sinkers are the keepers.

Thankfully for those of us who enjoy eating piñon nuts, but aren't keen on picking them, local vendors around the state offer bags of the roasted nut and a plethora of tasty piñon treats, like breads, chocolate, brittle, toffee, and even coffee! While pine nuts are common in other parts of the world, the New Mexican piñon is special, coming from a certain species of pine (a 2-needled pine) unique to the Southwest. In 1987, New Mexico passed the Piñon Nut Act to support the state's piñon nut industry. It is illegal in New Mexico for anyone to label and sell pine nuts from species other than those listed in the law under the label, "piñon nuts." If you're gathering for personal use, no permit is required, but you are limited to 25 lbs. Considering the process, you'll be busy for a while. But if you do get your hands on some, try these local recipes!



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<https://www.newmexico.org/things-to-do/cuisine/recipes/go-nuts-in-new-mexico/>

<https://www.newmexico.org/nmmagazine/articles/post/yournutsnewmexico/>

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