

hassling with hazelnuts (dare we make a similar alliteration with filberts?)

350° F, 10-20 minutes, roll over for even bake, rub off skins

Not many people have had hands on experience with hazelnuts, occasionally called filberts. (What? A schitzophrenic nut?) Not many people even realize there is experience to be had. A few brave people have learned the hard way.

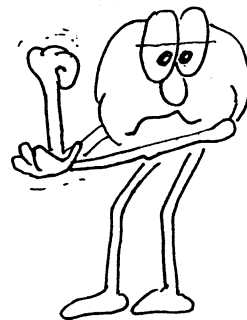
According to some unwritten law, hazelnuts are rarely sold in a "ready to use" format like most other nuts. Like your walnuts and your peanuts and your almonds and your pecans and your whatnuts. (Nots?) A lot of these nuts come with shells, without shells, roasted with skins, roasted without skins, unroasted, sliced, ground, slivered, chopped and generally conveniently processed for your individual needs. Not hazelnuts. They only get shelled. Their tight little pigheaded skins are left undisturbed.



Phil



Hazel

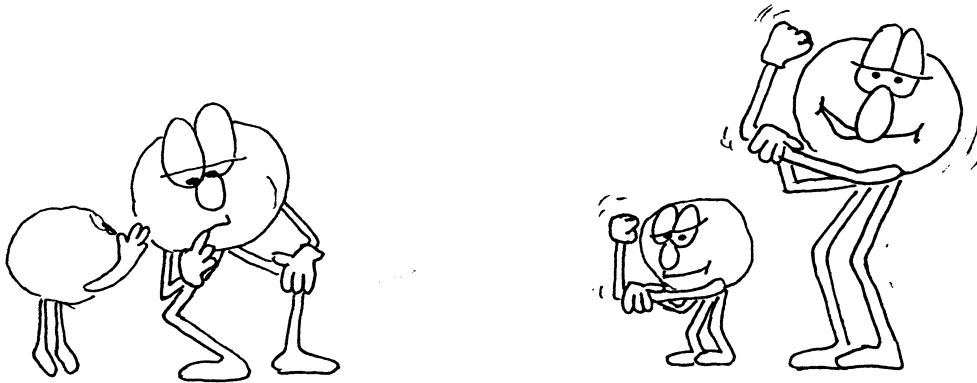


Bert

So your average unsuspecting amateur spots a great hazelnut recipe calling for toasted hazelnuts without skins, reads the innocent looking instructions for achieving this state and says "No big deal" or "Piece of cake" or some other such phrase picked at random from the category of Famous Last Words. This is a hassle to be avoided at all costs. Get your mother-in-law to do it for you. Put an ad in the paper. Sell secrets to the

Russians. (Japanese?) Do anything to get out of this. If none of these alternatives work, consider abandoning the recipe that got you into this. If you remain committed (they're worth it), bake the hazelnuts according to the above simple instructions.

By the way, rolling over means the hazelnuts not you. This is not a stupid pet trick. They need help to do this. And 10-20 minutes (we say give them the full sentence) means check these guys along the way to make sure. They don't burn. Who knows when your oven might go berzerk. An oven thermometer helps. Even if they don't look burned, the skins will taste that way, which is why they have to go, in case you were wondering.

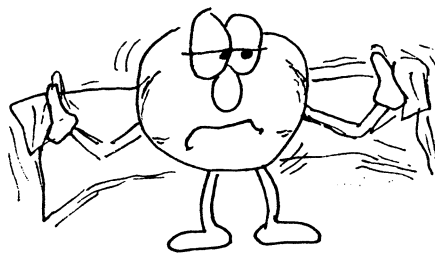


Europeans use arms instead of fingers. But proper technique is important...

Next comes "rubbing off the skins." (Squirrel City!) They don't just fall off. You have to work at it. Only about a third of the nuts give up most of their skin easily. The rest are a challenge. First of all, they have just been removed from a 350° F oven and those little suckers are hot! We surmise on the basis of hindsight that 5 minutes in the freezer might make them more manageable but we've always been too impatient to wait. Rubber gloves might work but there never seem to be any on hand. (On hand, get it?) The most effective technique is to take a handful and cup them in your hands in a praying position (the hands not you) and rub them back and forth along the direction of your fingers, keeping pressure

on the nuts so the friction among them pulls off the skins. The next most effective method is to put the same amount of nuts in a thick kitchen towel and pretend the towel isn't there. The friction is not as effective but the insulating factor more than compensates. And after the first go at the nuts they are almost ready for a second towel-free run for final cleanup.

Some of the skins just refuse to come off. A fingernail can help but sometimes the skin looks like it's painted on. Liberate those nuts or ignore them. What are a few skins anyway. Or roast twice as many nuts as you need and go with the cooperative ones. Save the rest for a "withskins" recipe. Be sure none of the loose skins accompany your nuts to the next stage. Compressed air hoses work great for those of you baking in your garage. Leafblowers would probably be overkill.



So you've reached the grinding stage. But the hassle isn't over. You can't just throw all the nuts in the blender and leave it on a while without risking the accidental production of a close relative of chunky peanut butter. Do at most a half cup at a time and use the pulse button until most of the nuts have given up. Then pull them out, loosening with a knife or something. Throw the big chunks in the next batch.

NEVER SAY DIE! These are not cooperative nuts like walnuts. They resist all the way to the oven and beyond. (No surrender!) They have a secret weapon. Oil. For example, in a cheesecake crust with butter and sugar and cookie crumb company, they sweat some kind of organic superglue that will seep out of an inattentive springform pan and begin burning on the bottom of your oven. Setting off the smoke detector every time. A cookie sheet under the pan saves you from dealing with the oven cleaner. Transferring the problem to cleaning the sheet. The smoke detector will still go off. At this point you may try real superglue to seal the pan. But this will lead to problems if your guests dislike scoops of cheesecake rather than slices.

Doing this in quantity and squirreling away the overproduction in the fridge saves future hassles. To tell the truth, maybe we're exaggerating. Slightly.