

# Dehusking Black Walnuts

## Controls Rodent Pilferage

Rodney R. Nielsen  
Senior Forester  
New York State Department of  
Environmental Conservation  
Northville, N.Y.

Successful planting of black walnuts often depends upon adequate rodent control. I have found that an inexpensive method, assuring practically 100 percent control, is simply to remove all the husk material from the black walnut nuts before planting.

### The Study

In early May 1970, I removed 100 walnuts from stratification beds and rinsed the husk material from the nuts. Floatation was used to separate good and bad nuts. The cleaned nuts were planted 2 inches deep in two rows, spaced 6 inches within rows and 12 inches between rows. Another 50 nuts *with* husks were planted similarly.

This study took place in my back yard which is inhabited by a number of grey squirrels. Within a week of planting, the squirrels had stolen the 50 nuts that were planted with husks on, leaving only neat little holes. The dehusked nuts that had been planted were not disturbed though *they* all were within 25 feet of the others. About 90 percent of the dehusked nuts survived. Twelve of the surviving seedlings were albino, of which some survived until the end of August. The following

2 years only dehusked walnuts were planted, and there were no signs of pilfering, even though squirrels were seen in the area.

Several methods used to clean the husk from the nuts follow: After winter stratification, the husk material usually is very *mushy* and can be removed easily by rinsing with water. For small quantities, scrubbing and rinsing in a pail of water (using several changes of water) worked well. However, this method was time-consuming. Another method we used was to place the nuts in wire racks or wire boxes and set in a fast flowing stream. After a couple of days the nuts were clean. Possible contamination of the stream or damage to the aquatic life should be considered before doing any large quantities of nuts this way. Another excellent method is to place the nuts in a coarse wire tumbler and apply a high pressure water spray.

The key to ease of washing nuts is the degree of husk decomposition. The fact that walnuts from different trees have varied husk thicknesses that decompose at different rates under the same storage conditions must be considered. For ease of cleaning, walnuts should be gathered and immediately

stored in plastic garbage liners for 3 days or more at room temperature to soften the husk.

### Conclusions

Squirrels appear to locate planted nuts by the odor of the decaying husk. Only through protective devices, repellents, deodorizers, or husk removal can direct seeding be successful. The cleaning method has the advantages of little or no mess in handling, ease of planting, and avoidance of the problem of planting seedlings. Dehusking before planting might be applicable to other types of nuts (such as butternut and hickory) that have a pulp *type* husk which attracts rodents.

### References

- McElwee, R.L.  
1970. "Artificial Regeneration of Hardwood" from *Silviculture of Oaks and Associated Species*, USDA, Forest Services, Research Paper NE-144, Pp. 17-24.
1972. Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, Black Walnut Advisory, Sheet #29 (January).