

LET'S TALK "ACORNS"© *by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee, Florida*

The "acorn nuts" shown below on the left are often also correctly referred to as "cap nuts", but are incorrectly referred to as "dome nuts"! Dome nuts are physically much different than acorn nuts and have different applications! This is all rather "academic" and you are not to worry about retaining these facts because the intent of this article is to discuss the acorns shown below on the right!



Man-Made "Acorn Nuts"!



Florida Live Oak-Made Acorns

For those of us who reside in Florida, we know very well that there is a definite proliferation of live oak trees all around us and the Kissimmee Bay Country Club (KBCC) residential sub-division offers no exception! As is true of all the various varieties of oak trees here in the USA and around the world, at certain times of the year the trees produce an abundance of acorns! As I write this article during September, 2014, that "certain time of the year" has been with us for the past couple weeks and will continue for some future period! There are acorns everywhere and this brings about both some bad and good news as well as affording one the challenge to learn more about them!

The bad news about acorns is that they make a huge mess in the streets, on our sidewalks and in our yards and a considerable amount of time and effort is required to constantly clean them up! Of course any acorns that are not removed from our grassy areas, will result in a "forest" of mini oak trees taking root during the following years' growing seasons!

The good news about having an abundance of acorns lying about is that they are a readily-available food source for numerous types of hungry birds, animals, and rodents! Of equally good news, since acorns are non-poisonous, they are edible by humans; however, ridding acorns of their bitter taste requires some time-consuming preparation and it's likely that few humans eat them. The bitterness is attributed to tannins; a tannin is an astringent, bitter plant polyphenolic compound that binds to and precipitates proteins and various other organic compounds including amino acids and alkaloids.

Live oak acorns top the food list for birds such as wood ducks, wild turkeys, quail and jays. Squirrels, raccoons and whitetail deer also like them, sometimes to the point of being 25% of their fall diet. Interestingly, the tannin tends to be in the bottom half of the acorn which is why you will often see a squirrel eat only the upper half of the acorn. Squirrels are also not fools. They will eat all of a white acorn when they find one because it is the least bitter. They will bury the very bitter red and black acorns so over time some of the bitterness is leached into the soil. Raiding a squirrel's hoard will get bitter acorns. By the way, acorns shells and unleached nutmeat have gallotannins which are toxic to cattle, sheep, goats, horses and dogs.

So, there you have it! Just a few "words for the wise" about acorns! I hope you feel "enlightened"!