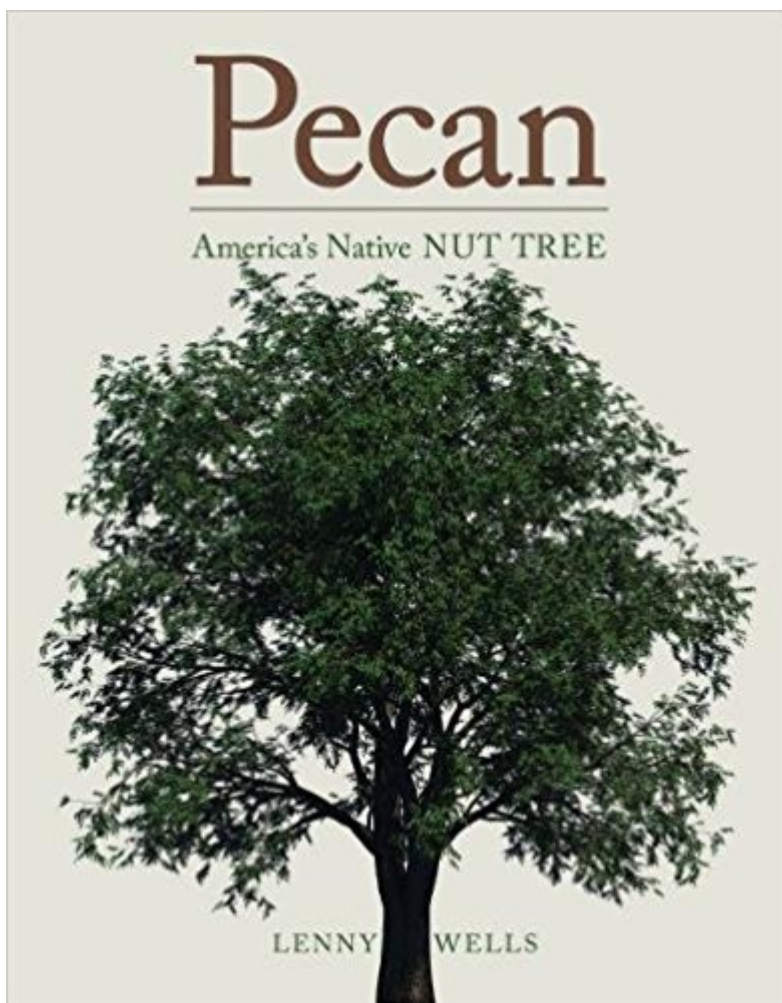


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Pecan: America's Native Nut Tree



Synopsis

Written in a manner suitable for a popular audience and including color photographs and recipes for some common uses of the nut, *Pecan: America's Native Nut Tree* gathers scientific, historical, and anecdotal information to present a comprehensive view of the largely unknown story of the pecan. From the first written record of it made by the Spaniard Cabeza de Vaca in 1528 to its nineteenth-century domestication and its current development into a multimillion dollar crop, the pecan tree has been broadly appreciated for its nutritious nuts and its beautiful wood. In *Pecan: America's Native Nut Tree*, Lenny Wells explores the rich and fascinating story of one of North America's few native crops, long an iconic staple of southern foods and landscapes. Fueled largely by a booming international interest in the pecan, new discoveries about the remarkable health benefits of the nut, and a renewed enthusiasm for the crop in the United States, the pecan is currently experiencing a renaissance with the revitalization of America's pecan industry. The crop's transformation into a vital component of the US agricultural economy has taken many surprising and serendipitous twists along the way. Following the ravages of cotton farming, the pecan tree and its orchard ecosystem helped to heal the rural southern landscape. Today, pecan production offers a unique form of agriculture that can enhance biodiversity and protect the soil in a sustainable and productive manner. Among the many colorful anecdotes that make the book fascinating reading are the story of André Pénicaut's introduction of the pecan to Europe, the development of a Latin name based on historical descriptions of the same plant over time, the use of explosives in planting orchard trees, the accidental discovery of zinc as an important micronutrient, and the birth of kudzu clubs in the 1940s promoting the weed as a cover crop in pecan orchards. **Published in cooperation with the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, Ellis Brothers Pecan, Inc., and The Mason Pecans Group**

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"One might think that a book on pecans would garner interest from relatively few botanical or horticultural specialists, but one would be wrong. This is a remarkable, rich narrative of North America's most commercially successful native nut species. [. . .] Pecan is both exceedingly informative and entertaining. Highly recommended." • "Choice • I have known Lenny Wells for quite some time and was well aware of his expertise as a pecan scientist and extension specialist. What I was not aware of was his ability as a storyteller. I was captivated by the story, and riveted by the accounts as he related them. The book is not only a unique history of the pecan, but an interesting account of a significant part of American history." • "William D. Goff, senior editor for Pecan Production in the Southeast • Lenny Wells has done a masterful job weaving together many topics regarding the pecan • tree improvement, propagation, horticulture, and the related topics of environmental science, natural history, and the duality of human planning and human caprice • relating it to the history and culture of North America over the last four hundred years." • "Henry Hughes, director of education at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Birmingham, Alabama

Lenny Wells is an associate professor in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the University of Georgia. His work with the Cooperative Extension Service is focused primarily on developing sustainable methods of pecan culture. Wells edited the Southeastern Pecan Growers Handbook and has been a regular columnist for Pecan South, The Pecan Grower, the Albany Herald, and Georgia Gardening.

A very nice reading book, conveying history that would otherwise not have been told in one book. Lenny did a nice job and the history, as well as other detail add up to my expectation. This is not a typical handbook, but as I have said, an easy reading book summarizing and conveying history. Very nice Lenny!

A outstanding reference on pecans.

If you are interested in pecans, this book should interest you. It covers some of the history, the tree in its natural ecology, the development of varieties, farming pecans, the pecan industry generally, the market today, and has some recipes in an appendix. The section on the current market are likely to be out of date soon, as pecan orchard plantings are expanding in Brazil, Argentina, Australia, South Africa and elsewhere--and the Chinese are continuing their recent huge purchases. People have eaten pecans for a long time, the book says as early as 6750 BC. Natural stands have long been exploited but the earliest documented planted trees were in Mexico in 1711. The natural range is river bottom lands, as far north as southern Illinois and as far south as central Mexico. The trees can get to over 100 feet tall and produce nuts for a century. The best chapter in the book is chapter 3, "The Secret Life of Pecan Trees," has all this detail and is fascinating. Much of the book is on people and the varieties they created, usually by discovering a tree producing nuts with unusually good qualities and then grafting that on to rootstock (trees reproduced by seed do not reliably produce the same quality nuts as their parents). The first person to try it was a slave gardener on a Louisiana plantation, named Antoine, of whom little else is known. That proved that grafting could be done, and led to thousands of varieties, selected for taste, think shell (for easier shelling), or ability to produce in particular soils or climates. Many of the people involved were quite interesting characters. Establishing pecan orchards is not so easy. Irrigation--particularly drip irrigation--has become imperative for consistent production. Varieties predominating vary a good deal geographically. Centers of US production are Georgia, Texas and New Mexico. The author has long been involved in pecan agriculture in Georgia. Chapter 5, "A Tree Without Borders," looks at pecan orchards elsewhere in the world. One story I found somewhat irritating, about the former Confederates who settled in Brazil, and brought the pecan to Brazil; the story is told without a mention that Brazil attracted them because slavery was not abolished there until 1888. It's an interesting story, but not so innocent as it sounds. Chapter 6 is, for me, the second best chapter, "Healing the Land with Orchards." This discusses agroecology, that is making the production compatible with biodiversity in a sustainable way, and pecans work well in such a system. The last chapter examines the huge impact of China on the pecan market, Chinese purchases jumping from a moderate amount to a quarter of US production in 2009. Overall, an interesting read. Wells' writing is good. In a few spots he gets a little effusive about how tasty and nutritionally good the nuts are, but mostly he's objective and almost always informative.

Well written and entertaining. A good read for those interested in the pecan.

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