

WEDNESDAY
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Gone Nuts

Culver City's Flanigan Farms family went nuts 28 years ago and has been cracking the shell of great recipes ever since

Stories by Lisa Messinger
FOOD EDITOR

Some Girl Scouts drove Patsy Flanigan nuts. It was 1970 and Flanigan, a stay-at-home mom whose four daughters were 13, 10 and 5, was the leader of a couple of Girl Scout troops. As members of one of the troops were mixing up gorp — that perennial camper and Scout favorite combination of nuts, seeds and raisins (also known as trail mix) — a light bulb went off in Flanigan's head.

She had been complaining for years that she could not find any healthful packaged snacks for kids. "Gorp," she said, she remembers thinking, "Gorp could be the answer."

Later that year, Flanigan Farms Natural Foods was born. And soon moms all over California were stashing packages in their supermarket carts of "Nuts 'N' Things," Flanigan's blend of dry-roasted peanuts, raisins, raw sunflower seeds, almonds, cashews and pepitas (pumpkin seeds).

Those were the days when Owen, Flanigan's late husband who as a laid-off mechanical engineer started the company with her, made all the deliveries himself. Since then, the Culver City company, which also sells many kinds of roasted raw and dry-roasted nuts, has grown to 15 employees and 20 distributors and has become one of the most successful of its kind in the West.

"We truly found a niche," said Flanigan, who a few months ago the California Chamber of Commerce named the small business advocate of the year and is part of a White House delegation on small business. "Virtually the only kind of nuts you could buy then were roasted in oil and salted. But it was the beginning of the health food movement in this country and I wasn't the only mom who was more interested in nuts that were raw or dry roasted without oil and unsalted."

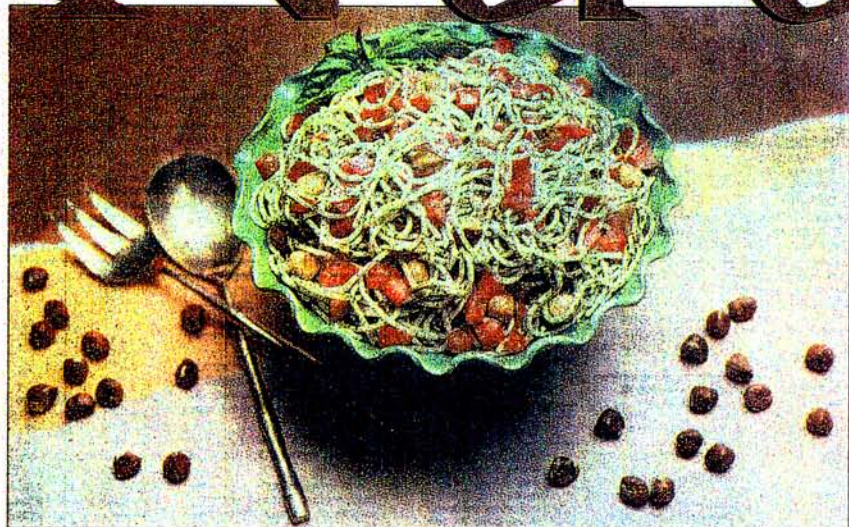
By tapping into that market, Flanigan also cracked the shell wide open of a whole other area: cooking with nuts.

"In those days," she recalled, "nuts were something you ate out of a bowl with your hands and that was about the extent of it — except for perhaps a small amount that was used in baking."

By introducing raw, unsalted nuts into the mainstream marketplace, Flanigan — who after starting the business returned to school and fed her lifelong interest in nutrition by getting a degree in food science from California State University at Northridge — made it possible to include nuts in recipes in ways that had never been explored before, but now are menu staples of the country's best restaurant and home chefs.

So when daughter Cathie, who has an MBA and worked at a number of other companies as a controller before joining Flanigan Farms as vice president of operations after her father's death in 1992,

GONE NUTS/A10



FOOD STYLING BY SUSAN BUCKNER PHOTO BY BRUCE BAZELTON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A pesto made from toasted hazelnuts adds rich flavor to this pasta dish that also features fresh tomatoes.

HAZELNUT PESTO PASTA

Hazelnut pesto:
2 cups packed fresh basil leaves
3 cloves garlic
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
¼ cup finely chopped toasted hazelnuts
½ to ¾ cup olive oil
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground pepper, to taste
Pasta:
3 ounces spaghetti, cooked
½ to 1 cup hazelnut pesto
2 medium fresh tomatoes, peeled, seeded and diced
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
½ cup coarsely chopped toasted hazelnuts or whole toasted hazelnuts (see note)
Grated Parmesan cheese, to taste
To prepare hazelnut pesto: Puree basil leaves and garlic in food processor or blender. Mix in Parmesan and hazelnuts. With machine running, drizzle in just enough olive oil to make a thin paste. Season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate for up to one week, or one month tightly sealed in freezer.

To serve: Toss hot spaghetti with hazelnut pesto, to taste. Mix in tomatoes and a sprinkling of freshly ground black pepper. Top with toasted hazelnuts and a sprinkling of grated Parmesan cheese. Yields 4 to 6 servings.

Note: Toast nuts, whether whole, chopped or ground, on a jelly-roll pan or in a roasting pan, bake the nuts in a 350° oven and stir often with a flat, wide spatula or pancake turner until they are evenly golden colored. Toasting the nuts too much may result in a bitter taste. If the nuts are to be chopped or ground after roasting, cool and chill them first so that the oils will not exude and make the nuts pasty.

PISTACHIO PRIMAVERA

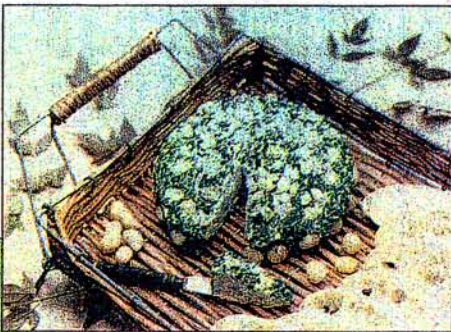
PASTA SALAD
Dressing:
5 tablespoons walnut oil (see note)
3 tablespoons lemon juice
½ teaspoon salt
Salad:
¾ pound fresh or frozen green beans, cut in

NUT RECIPES/A10



EDWARD A. ORIN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Patsy Flanigan's (center) search for healthful snacks when her children were young prompted her to found Flanigan Farms. Daughters Monica (left) and Cathie now work with her.



FOOD STYLING BY SUSAN BUCKNER PHOTO BY BRUCE BAZELTON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Above: In the hundreds of recipes she has featured over the years in her newsletter, Patsy Flanigan has never failed to use nuts creatively. This cheeseball is covered with macadamia nuts and chopped parsley.

Left: A vibrant pasta salad features fresh green beans, rotini pasta and pistachios in a walnut oil dressing.



Studies prove it's easy to be a health nut

Patsy Flanigan has met plenty of nut bigots. Although most of the comments the president of Culver City's Flanigan Farms Natural Foods gets are compliments on her raw or dry-roasted unsalted nuts or the hundreds of gourmet nut recipes she's disseminated over the last 28 years, there are lots of people who tell her, "I never eat nuts, they're full of fat."

Flanigan's answer to that: "Phooey!" Fortunately, the food scientist (she's got a degree in the field) is far from alone in her quick condemnation of the nut know-it-alls.

Nuts have mainly the kinds of fat that can be beneficial (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated compared to the harmful saturated fat found in meat and dairy products) and one new study after another is confirming their ability to help lower cholesterol, prevent heart attacks, satiate participants so that they stay on diets and lose weight and possibly help prevent cancer.

"Nuts are unfairly maligned in the health field despite the many potential benefits of eating them," wrote Frank Sacks, M.D., associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School/associate professor of nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, in an article last month in a journal of the International Nut Council reflecting a speech he gave at their annual convention. "Studies show that nuts decrease blood cholesterol, LDL (harmful) cholesterol and triglycerides. They — potentially reduce homocysteine levels that damage the arteries and can promote atherosclerosis. Nuts may also help protect against diabetes because they are high in dietary fiber which

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