

Shell-stocked women truly are health nuts

Some Girl Scouts drove Patsy Flanigan nuts.

It was 1970, and Flanigan, a stay-at-home mom whose daughters were 16, 13, 10 and 5, was the leader of a couple of Girl Scout troops.

As members of one of the troops were mixing 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 complained for years that she couldn't find healthful packaged snacks for children. "Gorp could be the answer," she says she remembered thinking.

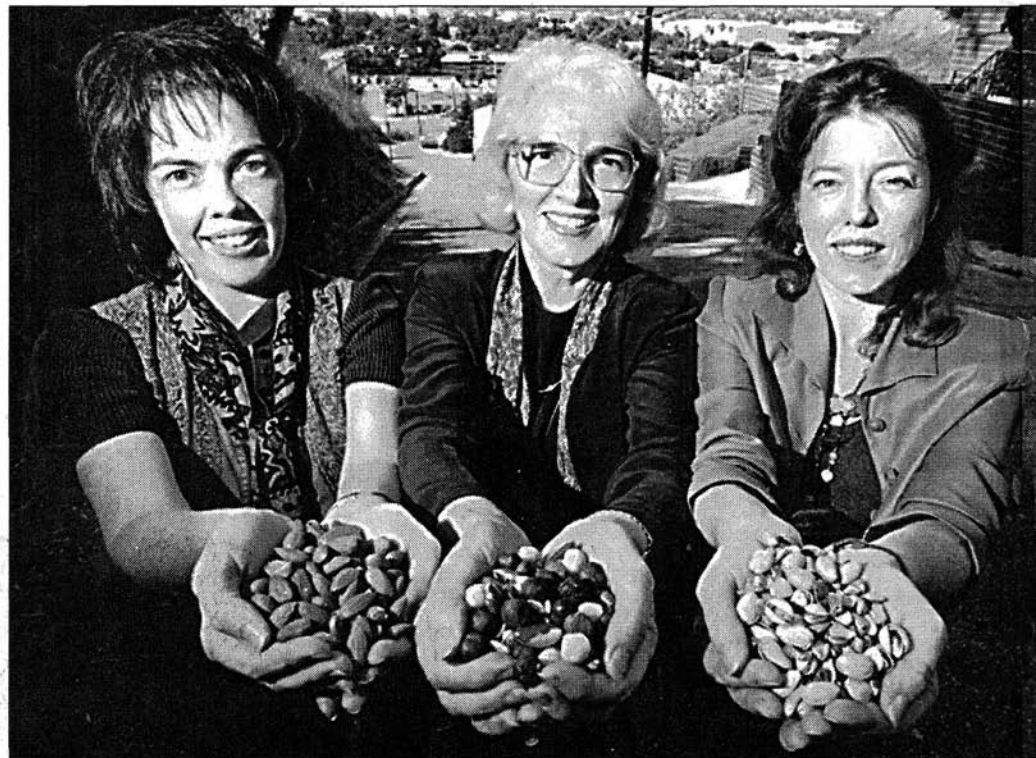
Later that year, Flanigan Farms Natural Foods was born in Los Angeles. Soon, moms nationwide were stashing in their supermarket carts packages of Nuts 'N' Things, Flanigan's blend of dry-roasted peanuts, raisins, raw sunflower seeds, almonds, cashews and pepitas (pumpkin seeds).

Flanigan was on to something. And almost 30 years later, studies are proving her instincts correct.

Nuts mainly have the kinds of fat that can be beneficial (mono-unsaturated and polyunsaturated, compared to the harmful saturated fat found in meat and dairy products), and studies confirm 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.

Almonds provide a good example of the prowess of nuts. Reflecting the positive profile of many nuts, more than 60 percent of the fat in almonds is mono-unsaturated, about 25 percent is polyunsaturated and only about 5 percent is saturated compared to 15 percent of the fat in olive oil (touted as a cholesterol fighter). Just 1 ounce of almonds (about 20 or 30 nuts) provides almost 40 percent of the daily recommendation of vitamin E, which studies show to be an anti-oxidant (possible cancer fighter).

A study reported recently in the "Journal of the American College of Nutrition" of people put on an almond-based diet for a month showed bigger drops in overall cholesterol levels and in LDL compared with those on an olive oil-based diet. Another study of 31,000 people who ate nuts, especially almonds, showed a 50 percent lower risk of heart attack than for



Patsy Flanigan, center, founded Flanigan Farms, a natural nut company, in 1970 after searching for healthful snacks for her young children. Daughters, Monica, left, and Cathie now work with her.

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those who did not eat nuts.

Nuts also might be the answer to dieters' prayers: a food that keeps them full and satisfied while still allowing them to lose weight.

The six-month data is in from a study that Sacks is co-directing at Harvard. Those who ate a nutty diet with 35 percent unsaturated fat lost as much weight as those on a diet featuring 30 percent fat (mainly saturated fat). The triglyceride levels (which can be a predictor of heart attack) were better in the unsaturated group and so was acceptance of the diet.

Flanigan is humble about her pioneering efforts. "We truly found a niche," said Flanigan, who the California Chamber of Commerce named the Small Business Advocate of the Year and who 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 — 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.

For Flanigan Farms' "Guide to Edible Nuts & Seeds" pamphlet, send a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope to Flanigan Farms, P.O. Box 347, Culver City, CA 90232. This recipe is from "Hazelnuts & More" by

Lucy Gerspacher (Graphics Arts Publishing), and was published in a recent edition of the Flanigan Farms newsletter. The instructions for toasting nuts are from "Nick Malgieri's Perfect Pastry" (Macmillan Publishing).

Hazelnut Pesto Pasta

Hazelnut Pesto

2 cups packed fresh basil leaves
3 cloves garlic
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
¾-cup finely chopped toasted hazelnuts
½ to ¾-cup olive oil
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground pepper, to taste

Pasta

8 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

For 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 1 week, or 1 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 jellyroll pan or in roasting pan. Bake nuts in 350-degree oven and stir often with flat, wide spatula or pancake turner until evenly golden colored.

Toasting nuts too much might result in bitter taste. If nuts are to be chopped or ground after toasting, cool and chill them first so that oils will not exude and make nuts pasty.

Pistachio Primavera Pasta Salad

Dressing

5 tablespoons walnut oil (see note)
3 tablespoons lemon juice
¼-teaspoon salt
Freshly ground pepper, to taste

Salad

¼-pound fresh or frozen green beans, cut in 2-inch pieces and steamed until tender-crisp

2 cups rotini, cooked according to package directions (drained and rinsed with cold water)

1 yellow bell pepper, cut into small strips

2 cups shelled pistachios, lightly toasted

¼ cup basil leaves, coarsely chopped
For dressing: In small bowl, combine all ingredients.

For salad: In large bowl, toss all salad ingredients with dressing and chill thoroughly.

Yields 6 servings.

Note: To make walnut oil, combine 1 cup toasted walnuts with 2 cups vegetable oil. Cover and refrigerate for 3 days. Strain before using. Yields 2 cups. Refrigerate unused oil for future use.

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Cooking Corner

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