

California Almond Varieties

There are more than thirty major almond varieties grown in California. Each has unique characteristics in terms of shell hardness, kernel shape, color and surface, and provides subtle nuances in the resulting flavor profile. California almonds are an exceptionally versatile, value-adding ingredient. Available in more forms than any other nut, almonds are easy to work with from a formulation perspective and complement a wide array of food flavors and applications including confectionery, bakery, dairy, prepared food or snacks. Whether in whole, sliced, slivered, chopped, diced or ground form, either with the skin still on (natural) or removed (blanched), the application opportunities are unlimited. Understanding the differences makes it possible to select the appropriate variety and form for specific application needs. Almonds are further categorized into the following four broad classifications:

• Nonpareil

Considered the “King” of snacking almonds, this variety also has the widest range of uses. Because of its thin outer shell, uniform shape, and smooth kernel, it is less likely to chip and scratch during processing – making the Nonpareil the best choice when an attractive appearance is needed.



NONPAREIL This variety blooms early and is harvested early. The shells are soft, brown in color and have a high suture opening. The kernels are medium in size with a flat shape and light in color with a smooth surface.

• California Group

This group includes a number of varieties, including Monterey, Sonora, Fritz, Peerless and Price. These varieties are primarily used in processing and blanching. Shape and color may vary, however, the kernels are more round and the skins darker than the Nonpareil.



MONTEREY This variety is harvested 40-60 days after Nonpareil with a high percentage of doubles. The shells are hard, brown in color with a smooth surface and have a low suture opening. The kernels are large in size with a long narrow shape, and deeply wrinkled surface.



SONORA This variety is harvested 7-10 days after Nonpareil and are considered as an alternative to Nonpareil. The shells are paper, dark brown in color with a rough surface, and have a high suture opening. The kernels are large in size with a long narrow shape, light in color and have a smooth surface.



FRITZ This variety is harvested 40-60 days after Nonpareil. The shells are soft, light in color, have a low suture opening, and good integrity. The kernels are small in size with a medium plump shape, and dark brown in color with a fairly wrinkled surface.



PEERLESS This variety is harvested 7-10 days after Nonpareil. The shells are hard, light in color, have no suture opening, a smooth surface, and good integrity. The kernels are medium in size with a wide shape and fairly wrinkled surface.



PRICE This variety is harvested 7-10 days after Nonpareil with a high percentage of doubles. The shells are paper, dark brown in color with a rough surface, and have a high suture opening. The kernels are small in size with a short narrow shape and fairly wrinkled surface.

• Carmel

This popular nut is a soft-shell variety and is most often used for blanching and roasting. The Carmel has a large elongated kernel, a uniform shape, and an even light caramel color. Because of this it is often used as a substitute for Nonpareil.



CARMEL This variety is harvested 25-30 days after Nonpareil. The shells are soft, with good integrity and a fair suture opening. The kernels are medium in size with a narrow shape and slightly wrinkled surface.

• Mission Group

This group includes several varieties, including Padre and Butte. The kernels are small, wide and plump with a dark skin. The Mission varieties are used in processing and blanching, however, because of their full-bodied flavor, they are the perfect choice for roasting and flavoring.



BUTTE This variety is harvested 25-30 days after Nonpareil with versatile kernel applications. The shells are semi-hard, light in color with a smooth surface, and have a low suture opening. The kernels are small in size with a short plump shape and a wrinkled surface.



PADRE This variety is harvested 25-30 days after Nonpareil and is similar to Butte. The shells are hard with good integrity, and have no suture opening. The kernels are small in size with a short wide shape and dark brown in color with a wrinkled surface.



MISSION This variety is harvested 40-60 days after Nonpareil. They have a strong flavor and are not blanchable. The shells are hard, with good integrity, and have no suture opening. The kernels are small in size with a short wide shape, dark brown in color and a deeply wrinkled surface.

