

# Walnut Wonderland

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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There is nothing I enjoy more than visiting my Uncle Wally and Aunt Wendy at their walnut farm in the San Joaquin Valley of California. There are many walnut **orchards** in this area of the state and Uncle Wally and Aunt Wendy told me that walnut trees grow well here because of the rich, **fertile** soil with full sun and long summers.

## Fall

Late fall is a beautiful time of year. As my mom drives to the farm I start to wonder how the walnut trees will look. Walnut trees are **deciduous**. This means that every year, during the fall, the leaves of the trees change color from green to orange, red, and gold before they eventually fall off the tree. Uncle Wally is always in a good mood near the end of fall because the walnut **harvest** is over. I can hardly wait to find out what he and Aunt Wendy have planned. They always make my visits extra special.

When we arrive at the farm the sun was beginning to set. Uncle Wally greets me with a big hug and tells me he needs my help in the kitchen. He is the best cook ever! I especially love his freshly baked chocolate chip cookies with toasted walnuts. After washing my hands, Uncle Wally lets me crack open the hard walnut shells to get out the nut (meat). I then sprinkle the walnuts over the green salad that Aunt Wendy had made earlier that day. The kitchen smells delicious and I am very hungry.

Aunt Wendy enters the kitchen with a big smile. She is happy because it has been a very good growing year and the trees have **produced** more walnuts than ever before, a big **yield**. As we sit down for dinner, Uncle Wally tells me that he has something special planned for me in the morning. I can hardly wait!

I wake up to birds chirping. The sun is rising and I can see it is going to be a beautiful day. I get dressed and run out to the walnut orchard to find Uncle Wally. Farmers usually wake up early because there is so much work for them to do. Uncle Wally greets me with a big smile and a giant rope swing! Wow! This is one special surprise. Walnut trees are very big and strong. I jump on the swing and immediately start to pump my legs so I can get higher and higher. On a count of one, two, and three, I jump into a big pile of leaves!

## Winter

Winter on the walnut farm is the quietest time. When I visit, I find that Uncle Wally and Aunt Wendy have been hard at work **pruning** the trees and cutting down broken branches. They are also making sure that there are no **pests** damaging the trees. During the wintertime, the trees are **dormant** and look like they are dead because all of their leaves have fallen to the ground. It is the perfect time to watch tree squirrels climb up the tree and **scavenge** for walnuts that were not taken at harvest time. Empty bird nests are seen in the trees as bird families have **migrated** to warmer areas.

## Spring

I go to visit the walnut farm during spring break. The young walnut trees are fast growing and can grow up to three feet in one year! The older trees are blossoming and new leaves are beginning to sprout. Walnut trees have both boy (male) and girl (female) flowers. When the female flower of one kind of walnut tree gets pollen from a boy flower from another type of walnut tree, **pollination** will occur and a walnut will grow. Wind can easily carry pollen to far away flowers because it is so small in size.

## **Walnut Wonderland** *(continued)*

### **Summer**

My favorite time to visit Uncle Wally and Aunt Wendy's farm is in the late summer. They show me how to make sure the trees are getting enough water. The San Joaquin Valley is very hot in the summer, but the leaves of the walnut trees are full of beautiful green leaves that create a thick **canopy**. It is fun to make a fort under the canopy and enjoy the cooler temperature where there is shade. Walnuts have a bright green casing called a **hull** that covers the nut. The hull of a walnut is Mother Nature's way of protecting the nut from harm. When the weather cools a little in late summer, almost like magic the hull cracks open, exposing the walnut when it is almost time to harvest. As the farm safety inspector Aunt Wendy makes sure all of the equipment is being maintained in good working order and that workers attend a farm safety meeting once a week to go over procedures that will keep them from getting hurt on the job.

### **Fall**

It is now late September and Uncle Wally, Aunt Wendy, and their workers are spending many hours working in the walnut orchard. The harvesting machinery is cleaned and Aunt Wendy and the workers make sure the ground beneath the walnut trees is clear of **debris** as part of a food safety step for when the walnuts fall off the trees.

Uncle Wally tells me that the **mechanical** shaker is oiled and ready to go. I give him a confused look and he explains that each tree is shaken with a machine that has a mechanical arm that attaches to the tree's trunk. As the tree is shaken, the ripe walnuts fall to the ground. Another machine sweeps the walnuts into piles of long rows on the ground so they can be collected and taken to a **processing** plant. Here, the walnuts are placed on **conveyor** belts while workers sort the best walnuts to be shelled and packaged for **consumers** to eat.

Now it is time for me to leave the walnut farm and go back to school. I tell Uncle Wally and Aunt Wendy that I love watching the walnut trees change throughout the year and eating the delicious walnuts that grow on the trees. Before I leave they hand me a package. I peek inside and find my favorite chocolate chip cookies with toasted walnuts. I think I will really enjoy my car ride home.