What are your favorite holiday foods? Ingredients for many of them can be grown and found locally. Beyond the common dishes using apples, pumpkins and pecans, there are lots of regionally native plants for local flavor. “Nutella” is used in everything from breakfast waffles to evening desserts; with native hazelnuts, cocoa and milk, you can make your own.

More than 30 nuts and fruits native to the Great Plains can be easily incorporated into baking. Some of the better ones include:

- **Berries and plums**: A relatively simple way to use native fruits such as gooseberries, buffaloberries, chokecherries, plums and blackberries is to bake them into a pie. They’re good in breads and muffins also.

- **Chokeberry** (*Aronia*) is an eastern United States native that has become common in Nebraska gardens. Its berries can be used as above and they’re some of the best for juicing and smoothies.

- **Walnuts, hazelnuts and hickories**: Native black walnuts have a strong, somewhat “wild” flavor that can enhance almost any dish that uses nutmeats, including breads, cookies, cakes and fudge. Walnuts can also garnish main dishes such as roasts, potatoes and pastas. Walnuts grow in abundance throughout much of Nebraska and are usually in good supply—just follow the squirrels to a local tree. If you’re lucky enough to have hazelnut shrubs, or shagbark or shellbark hickory trees nearby, their fruits can be used in the same way.

- **Pawpaw**: The fleshy, custard-like fruit of pawpaw is best used in cookies and breads where its strong, spicy flavor can complement other ingredients. Pawpaws grow in the shady understory of oak-hickory forests, such as those in extreme eastern Nebraska. Timing is critical as the fruit typically has a very narrow harvest window from mid to late October.

- **Chestnuts** can be used for grilling, roasting or stuffing.

- **Acorns** of white oak, swamp white oak or bur oak can be roasted like chestnuts or made into pastes and butters that are similar to peanut butter (go online to learn how to leach them).

- **Hackberry and black cherry** can be used in making jams, pemmican or jerky.

- **Persimmon**: The berry-like fruit of persimmon is often used in baking breads, cookies and fruitcakes. One of its best uses, however, is in bread pudding, where its rich flavor stands out. Persimmons are small, forest-edge trees. Although the tree is not common in the Great Plains, its fruit can be found at specialty markets and even some grocery stores.

Wonderful recipes for baking local can be found in *Wild Seasons—Gathering and Cooking with Wild Plants of the Great Plains* published by the University of Nebraska Press and written by naturalist Kay Young. *Wild Seasons* has more than 200 recipes for 50 or more regional plants. And there are many online resources for baking with wild or landscape plants. Native plants can add a “sense of place” to our tables as well as our landscapes. More recipes and resources at [http://heartland-nuts-n-more.myshopify.com/](http://heartland-nuts-n-more.myshopify.com/) and [http://www.pinterest.com/pin/427419820855692425/](http://www.pinterest.com/pin/427419820855692425/).