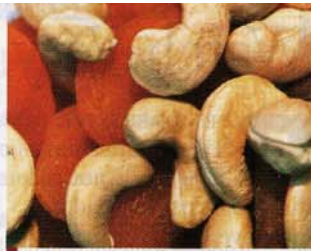


Newsweek



FRUIT AND NUT: LAB CURIOSITIES

NANOTECH

Smart Gel-o

APRICOTS AND cashews aren't normally considered nanomaterials, but they're turning out to be useful in this growing new field.

George John, a professor of materials science at City College of New York, has found a way to turn apricot pits and cashew shells into "smart gels"—a substance that can expand or contract in response to something in its environment, such as the presence of a chemical or a change in temperature.

(John's gels are considered nanomaterials because they've got smaller and more complex features—on the scale of molecules—than ordinary gels.) He's been able to turn the oil from cashew-

nut shells into a gel that could one day be used to hold a drug and release it in the presence of cancer cells. Another gel responds to oil by increasing the space between its molecules, soaking up the oil like a sponge; it might come in handy one day for cleaning spills.

—RUPALI ARORA