

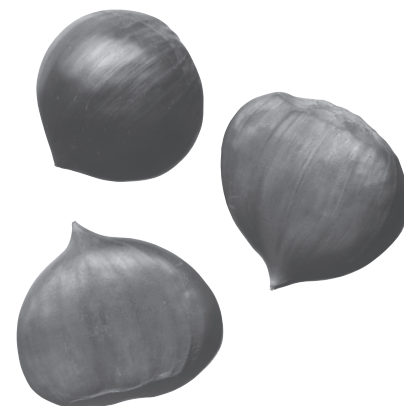
# Chestnuts

## *Chestnuts roasting on an open fire...*

A rich culinary history and nostalgic memories are rekindled when chestnuts appear each fall. Some can still remember holiday seasons with street vendors selling roasted chestnuts on the sidewalks of New York and Philadelphia. For just a few pennies, people could buy a bag of hot chestnuts to eat as they strolled along the chilly streets.

Portland streets host a scattering of large old chestnut trees, many planted by European immigrants in the early 1900s. However, these trees, being random seedlings, differ markedly from the commercially grown chestnut.

Botanically chestnuts are actually a fruit from the Fagaceae family which is related to oak and beech trees.



## *Buying and Storing Tips*

Fresh chestnuts usually begin appearing in the produce section of most markets in October. Traditionally they are cooked and added to stuffing at Thanksgiving.

Look for firm, heavy chestnuts with dark shells. Although some recommendations call for choosing nuts with “shiny” shells, this can be misleading. According to Chris Foster of Cascadia Chestnuts, “unless they are displayed in a refrigerated state, the shells will lose their shine in only a couple of days. When perfectly cured and ready to eat, the shells are actually quite dull, rather than shiny.” Fresh (meaning uncured), unpeeled chestnuts can be stored in a cool, dry place for one week or can be refrigerated for up to a month.

Foster explains, “Buying chestnuts in the store is a bit like buying a pear. The squeeze test (to

see if chestnuts are slightly softened or a little rubbery to the touch) is the only way to know for sure if a chestnut is ready to eat.” To cure chestnuts, lay them out on a table at room temperature, until the kernel begins to soften a bit. Curing a fresh chestnut can take from no time at all (as in ready to eat) to as much as 7 days. Once they are cured or semi-dry they need to be cooked and eaten soon, as they are more susceptible to mold.

Both the shell and the thin brown skin of the chestnut need to be removed before eating. For roasting or cooking, pierce the shell of the chestnut with a sharp knife, making an “X” so that the shell does not burst during roasting. Using a serrated knife in a sawing motion works well for this. Try to just cut the shell, rather than into the kernel.

## Oven Roasting

After scoring, lay the nuts in an oven proof dish. Roast at 400 degrees F for about 20 minutes. Let cool, peel, eat and enjoy.

## Stove Top Roasting

After scoring, roast medium or small chestnuts in a heavy, dry pan (cast-iron is preferred). Do not crowd the chestnuts. Cook over moderate heat, on the stove top, shaking the pan or stirring for about 15 minutes. Remove chestnuts from heat and place in a bowl, cover with a kitchen towel. Nuts will continue cooking and slowly begin to cool. Stove top cooking will blacken the shells, much like roasting on an open fire.

## Boiling Chestnuts

After scoring, put the nuts in slightly salted water and bring to a boil. Take the chestnuts out at once and peel while warm.

## Tips

After cooking, chestnuts can be stored in the refrigerator for a few days. They can be used in desserts or as a savory main dish accompaniment. Most recipes utilizing chestnuts suggest cooking them first, using one of the above methods, though eating them alone as a snack, appetizer or dessert is great too. They also pair well with a glass of red wine.

## Nutritional Highlights

Chestnuts (European, roasted),  
10 kernels (84 grams)

Calories: 206

Protein: 2.67 grams

Carbohydrates: 44.5 grams

Total Fat: 1.8 grams

Fiber: 4.3 grams

Chestnuts are an excellent source of Vitamin B6 and Vitamin C. They also are a good source of potassium and folic acid.

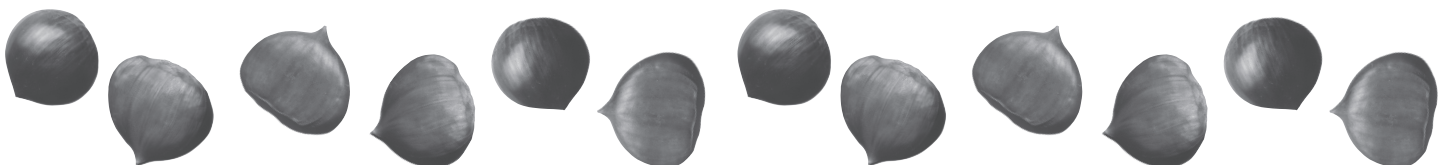
## Peeling Chestnuts

THE MICROWAVE METHOD:

After scoring chestnuts with an "X", place around the outer edge of a paper plate. Cook chestnuts on high. As each microwave is different, start with 15 seconds. Check to see if peel comes off easily and adjust time for your microwave.

THE JOY OF COOKING METHOD:

Use the tip of a sharp knife to cut an "X" on the flat side of each nut. Drop into a pot of boiling water, let the water return to a boil, and boil for 5 minutes. Turn off the heat. Remove a few nuts at a time and peel off the outer shell and inner papery layers. If some resist peeling, return them to the pot to soak longer. Reboil if necessary. Now the chestnuts are ready to cook.



## SOURCES:

Chris Foster of Cascadia Chestnuts • Healthnotes, Inc. at [www.healthnotes.com](http://www.healthnotes.com) •

Nancy Pettit at [www.delmarvelouschestnuts.com](http://www.delmarvelouschestnuts.com) • The All New All Purpose Joy of Cooking by Irma S. Rombauer, Marion Rombauer Becker and Ethan Becker • Vegetarians in Paradise at [www.vegparadise.com](http://www.vegparadise.com)