

Roasting Chestnuts

A Simple Guide to this Traditional Holiday Treat



As the beloved "Christmas Song" brings to mind, the chestnut today is an endearing holiday treat. Yet in Europe, Asia and Africa, and third world countries, chestnuts are often used as an everyday potato substitute as they contain twice as much starch as do potatoes. Known as 'marrons' in France, they are a wonderful treat straight from the oven or from the fireplace, and you can make use of the chestnut in many ways, both sweet and savory. Discover this traditional holiday treat using these simple directions.

Oven Roasting

1. Preheat oven to 425 F.
2. Place chestnuts on a thick dish towel that is lying flat on a cutting surface. This will allow the chestnut to sink into the towel and "nest" to keep it from rolling as you score it.
3. Using a sharp knife, cut an "x" into one side of the chestnut to allow the steam to escape as it roasts. Failing to do this step will likely cause the chestnut to "pop" or explode altogether.
4. Place each chestnut (with the cut side up) on a cookie sheet and place in the oven for 20 to 30 minutes or until the chestnuts are tender, easy to peel, golden in color and the shells are beginning to open.
5. Remove the chestnuts from the oven when they are cool enough to handle and salt if desired.

Open Fire Roasting

1. Over an open fire, use a grill basket or popcorn roaster.
2. Begin roasting when the fire has diminished to medium flame with some hot coals beneath.
3. Score the raw chestnuts, (see above) then place them in the basket.
4. Move or shake the chestnuts frequently back and forth over the fire. Keep the chestnuts some inches away from the flame and coals, so they will not burn.
5. If the basket or roaster is kept at a reasonable distance from the heat, the chestnuts should be done when the skins have been somewhat blackened by the heat. Remove and serve as above.

Chestnut Tips

1. Use dry, firm chestnuts; very soft chestnuts may be spoiled.
2. An overcooked chestnut is dried out and hard.
3. Hot chestnuts are easier to peel than cold ones.
4. Cover the chestnuts with a dry towel to keep them warm while serving.
5. If the inner skins do not come off easily, the chestnuts are either under or over cooked.
6. One pound of raw chestnuts equals about 2 cups of peeled chestnuts.

CAUTION

Be careful not to hurt yourself. It is VERY easy to stab yourself while scoring the chestnut shell prior to baking. It is recommended that you use an oven mitt, or a heavy rawhide or leather glove to secure the chestnut securely on the towel and prevent it from moving while cutting the "x" in the side of the nut.



OTHER COOKING METHODS

For the microwave, put a half dozen raw scored chestnuts on a dish, and cook them for about half a minute at full power.

To boil chestnuts, first slit the raw chestnuts, boil for 10 minutes, and take them out of the water when you're ready to shell them.

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