



Roasted Chestnuts

Sat, 11/28/2009 - 12:16 -- Roger Doiron

Introduction:

Chestnuts, while very common in Europe, are hard to come by these days in the US as the result of a massive blight that wiped out most chestnut trees here during the first half of the 1900s. Fortunately, the tree is making a comeback, largely due to the efforts of the American Chestnut Foundation. Still, if you happen to be the lucky holder of a pound or so of these beauties, don't miss the opportunity to enjoy them at their best...roasted over an open fire. Chestnuts are like popcorn kernels, with a tough shell that traps moisture. And like popcorn, chestnuts will explode if you don't slit their shells before roasting. Use the point of a paring knife to cut a large "X" into the flat side of the shell to let the steam escape. Be sure to cut through the skin. The cooking methods below yield about 2-1/2 cups, enough to serve four. Note: Do not use a microwave oven. The chestnuts' texture is likely to turn gummy.

Preparation:

Fire-roasted: For this method, it's best to use a chestnut roaster, a cage-like device with a long handle specially designed for use in the fireplace. After slitting X's in the chestnuts, place them in the roaster and hold it over hot coals. Roast chestnuts for 8 to 10 minutes, shaking the roaster from time to time.

Oven-roasted: Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. After scoring them, place chestnuts in a single layer in a baking pan and sprinkle generously with water. Roast 17 to 20 minutes, or until the X-cut opens up and the shell begins to char. Continue to sprinkle water over chestnuts as they bake to prevent them from drying out. Stir occasionally. Peel both the shell and the skin off the roasted chestnuts while they are still hot. (If they cool so much that the shell won't easily come off, reheat them briefly.) Serve fresh from the oven because their flavor declines as they stand; they are always at their best when hot.

Pan-roasted: Heat a heavy sauté pan for one minute. When it's hot, add chestnuts in a single layer, sprinkle with a small amount of water, and cover the pan. Medium-high heat works best. Shake the pan often and continue to sprinkle with water, until shells begin to char and the X-cut opens up. Cooking time: about 10 minutes. After chestnuts are cooked, remove them from the pan and wrap them in a tea towel to retain moisture. Peel and eat as soon as they are cool enough to handle.

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Ingredients:

- 1 pound of chestnuts
- water

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