



# Why Chestnuts?

## Chestnuts: The "unNut" you'll love!

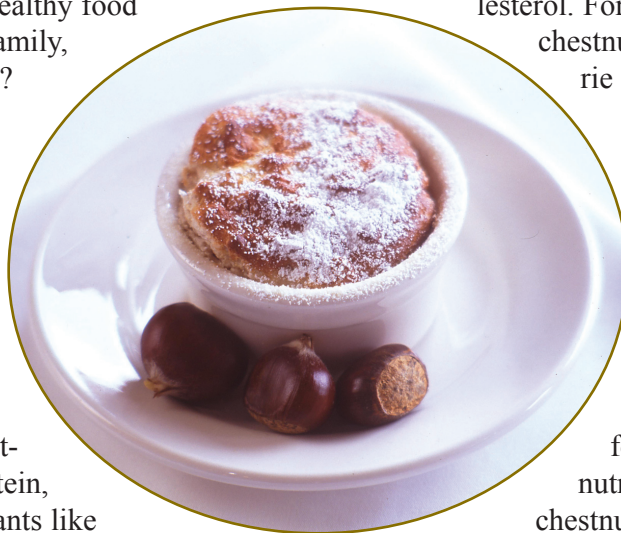
As you consider healthy food choices for your family, why not "go nuts"?

Nuts offer a range of excellent health benefits and will add flavor, crunch and appeal to every diet. Many nuts are a delicious source of unsaturated fatty acids, protein, fiber and antioxidants like vitamin E.

Chestnuts are called the "unNut" because nutritionally, they hardly resemble their tree-nut cousins. Unlike pecans and walnuts, chestnuts contain just a trace of fat. They also are the only nut that contains a significant amount of vitamin C. Like all plant foods, chestnuts contain no cho-

lesterol. For weight watchers, chestnuts are a low-calorie feast.

Not only are chestnuts delicious with a sweet, mild flavor, they are rich in nutritional benefits. Only a handful of other foods can match the nutritional value of a chestnut!

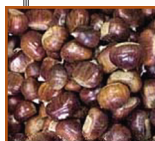


### Chestnuts add the gourmet flair

There's much more to chestnuts than roasting on an open fire! You'll discover a whole new flair in gourmet food when you start preparing the many exciting recipes featuring the chestnut. Chestnuts can be incorporated into a wide range of dishes, from soups and poultry, to appetizers, casseroles and pastries. A puree made from cooked chestnuts is used as a filling for dessert crepes, and candied chestnuts, or "marrons glace," are used in a variety of sweet desserts.

**Nutritionally, chestnuts are similar to whole grains and offer a sweet, subtle flavor.**

— Environmental Nutrition,  
11/1/2000



# NUTRITION and Your Health

## Counting calories?

### Choose chestnuts!

Chestnuts offer many of the fiber, mineral and cholesterol-free benefits of tree nuts, without the calories and fat content. Consider substituting roasted chestnuts for half of the rice in recipes, or use in combination with pasta for a filling meal. Chestnuts are called “the low-fat, low-calorie exception.” Research shows that people who eat nuts have a higher chance of success on a diet, due to the ability of nuts to lessen cravings for food between meals. (Source: *Environmental Nutrition*, 11/1/2000)

Chestnuts are one of the Top 10 energy-sustaining foods, according to Kimberly Brown, registered sports dietician. She cites chestnuts' low fat content, along with high fiber, vitamin C and folic acid, for their inclusion on her list of foods that "keep your body running on premium fuel." Chestnuts' low glycemic index keeps you feeling fuller longer. (Source: *Her Sports + Fitness*, 2005)

### Nutrient composition of 1 ounce (3 chestnuts/ounce) roasted chestnuts

(source: USDA; [www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/))

Protein	1.2 grams
Fat	0.3 grams
Carbohydrate	14.4 grams
Vitamin C	11 mg
Calories	68
Cholesterol	0
Potassium	135 mg

### Choosing and storing chestnuts

Choose chestnuts in shell that are plump, shiny and a dark, rich color. Check for any sign of mold and do not purchase if present. A solid, weighty feeling with no give when pressed with your thumb means a fresh nut that hasn't dried out. Interestingly, **chestnuts are perishable** and must be handled as though they were a fruit or vegetable. They **must be refrigerated** and will dry out if left out in a bowl with other nuts.

At harvest time, chestnuts have a bland, starchy flavor and a crisp, carrot-like texture (they are approximately 50 percent water). Fresh chestnuts will keep for two months or more in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, they should be stored in a thin plastic bag (a zip seal plastic bag works fine).

Prior to eating, they need to dry slightly – either for a few days at room temperature, or for a week or so in a mesh bag in the refrigerator. As they dry, in a process called “curing,” they become softer and some of the starch converts to sugar. Chestnuts are cured when they show a slight give between the shell and the meat when pressed by your thumb (30 percent moisture level). At this stage, they are sweeter, soft and at the best condition to eat.

Once cured, chestnuts should be eaten promptly to prevent spoilage.

### Preparing chestnuts

To prepare fresh chestnuts for using in recipes calling for **chopped chestnuts**, cut them in half with a hand pruner or culinary shears. There are various ways, detailed below, for heating the chestnuts to remove the outer shell and inner skin.

### Nutrition comparison of nuts (per ounce)

	Calories	Fat
Macadamias	204	21 g
Hazelnuts	178	17 g
Almonds	163	14 g
Peanuts	161	14 g
Pistachios	158	13 g
Cashews	157	12 g
Chestnuts	64	.3 g

**Steamed chestnuts:** Place scored chestnuts in a collapsible steaming basket in a pan with 1/2 inch of water. Bring water to a boil and steam chestnuts until the meats separate from the shell and chestnuts are desired consistency.



### Chestnuts: Chock Full of Nutrition!

- Low in oil, chestnuts are 99% fat free
- One-third the calorie content of peanuts and cashews!
- High in complex carbohydrates for energy
- Cholesterol free
- Contain as much Vitamin C as an equal weight of lemons
- Nutritionally similar to brown rice – described as “a grain that grows on a tree”
- Gluten free

## NUTrition and Your Health

**Microwaved chestnuts:** Place the chestnuts in a microwave-safe bowl and cover with a wet paper towel to preserve moisture. Microwave on high 1-2 minutes until chestnuts pop out of their shells.

**To prepare chestnuts for roasting and eating whole,** hold the chestnut firmly, flat side down. Using a knife, carefully score the shell of the round side of the chestnut by cutting

### Score chestnuts before cooking!



Carefully score chestnuts by making a single, 1/8th-inch deep slit across the center (equator) on the rounded side of the nut. A chestnut knife allows for piercing the shell as you cut. Chestnuts contain a high percentage of water, which turns to steam as it cooks and must escape the shell.



When scored properly, chestnuts will open when fully cooked, much like a clamshell. The chestnut meat easily pops out of the opening and is ready to eat or use in a recipe.

an arc from one side to the other. A chestnut knife has a curved, pointed blade and is the safest way to score chestnuts. (The Lamson Chestnut Knife is available online from [www.thekitchenstore.com](http://www.thekitchenstore.com)) This cut allows the chestnut to pop open when roasting is complete.

You also may use a hand pruner or culinary shears to make an incision in the shell of raw chestnuts instead of scoring with a chestnut knife. **If you do not score chestnuts before cooking, they will explode!**

**Fire-roasted chestnuts:** A chestnut roasting pan is the best method for grilling chestnuts over an open fire or grill. It has large perforations which allow for significant flame contact, enhancing the roasted, smoky flavor. Stir frequently while cooking for 20-30 minutes. After roasting, peel shell away from the meat and enjoy! (To speed roasting time, cook chestnuts in the microwave first as detailed above, and finish on the grill for 15 minutes.)

**Oven-roasted chestnuts:** Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Place scored nuts in a single layer on a roasting or baking pan. Roast 20-30 minutes.

### Support Missouri agriculture

The University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry is conducting research to test improved chestnut cultivars to allow Missouri farmers to be part of this growing market. The native American chestnut tree was completely devastated by blight by 1950, but the Chinese chestnut species is blight free, grows well in Missouri and shows promise as a profitable agricultural crop. The retail price for fresh chestnuts in the shell ranges from \$4-\$7 per pound; they can be purchased from most major grocers. Through buying and

consuming chestnuts, you can help increase demand and open markets in Missouri for this incredible “unNut.”

Every fall, the Center for Agroforestry hosts the **Missouri Chestnut Roast**, a showcase of Missouri agricultural products – especially those featuring chestnuts, pecans and black walnuts. Set in the beautiful rolling hills at the Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center near New Franklin, Mo., the event is a fun-filled day featuring a range of Missouri agricultural products and the agroforestry practices that help produce them. Join us each fall for free samples of roasted chestnuts and explore Missouri’s excellent wines, cheeses and nut products. For more information on Chinese chestnuts, or growing Chinese chestnuts in an agroforestry practice, contact the University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry at (573) 884-2874; or visit [www.centerforagroforestry.org](http://www.centerforagroforestry.org)

The University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry (UMCA), established in 1998, is an interdisciplinary research, teaching and technology transfer program. The Center is recognized as the leading institution for biophysical, economic and social research related to temperate agroforestry and its benefits to landowners and the environment.



## NUTrition and Your Health

Agroforestry practices benefit Missouri by increasing and diversifying products, markets and farm income; improving soil quality; and reducing erosion, nonpoint source pollution and damage due to flooding. In addition, agroforestry

practices enhance land and aquatic habitats for wildlife and fish and improve biodiversity.

*Portions of information provided by Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D.*



### Easy ways to enjoy the sweet, delicate flavor of Missouri chestnuts

- Add roasted chestnuts to pasta, vegetable and grain dishes.
- Top baked winter squash with a tablespoon of brown sugar and roasted, chopped chestnuts.
- Spread crepes or thin pancakes with chestnut puree mixed with maple or vanilla syrup. Top with a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar.
- Puree boiled chestnuts in a food processor, and use to thicken soups and sauces.
- Use roasted, seasoned chestnut halves instead of croutons on salad.

**Recipes!** Find great chestnut recipes online at  
<http://www.centerforagroforestry.org/pubs/recipes.asp>

#### Selected images and information provided by:

- **Girolami Farms**  
([www.chestnutsforsale.com](http://www.chestnutsforsale.com))
- **Empire Chestnut Company**  
([www.empirechestnut.com](http://www.empirechestnut.com))
- **Allen Creek Farm**  
([www.chestnutsonline.com](http://www.chestnutsonline.com))

#### Health benefit references:

Brown, K. Top 10 Energy Foods: Carbs Athletes Should Love. Her Sports + Fitness. 2005.

Klausner, A. In a Nutshell...A Handful of Nuts Can Be Good for You. Environmental Nutrition. November 2000.

## Center for Agroforestry

University of Missouri



Technology Transfer Unit  
203 ABNR  
Columbia, Mo. 65211  
(573) 884-2874  
[www.centerforagroforestry.org](http://www.centerforagroforestry.org)  
[umca@missouri.edu](mailto:umca@missouri.edu)