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Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire

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When I see chestnuts, I think holiday times. Once, when I was younger, I tried to roast chestnuts without knowing how – and – they exploded! Chestnuts have a closed shell and have moisture trapped inside, which when heated, can force the nut open. Follow the directions below to roast them safely. Eat chestnuts out of hand, or use in recipes.

Choosing Chestnuts

Harvest time for chestnuts is early October through late December. Chestnuts should have unwrinkled shells and a glossy brown surface. Avoid those that are dingy, mottled or contain small pinholes, which indicate worms. Fresh chestnuts should be firm and heavy, with no space between the shell and the nut meat.

Preparing Chestnuts

Make two crosscut gashes on the flat side of each chestnut with a sharp pointed knife. Sometimes the shell will come off while doing this, but the inner skin will protect the kernel. Place the nuts in a pan over a quick fire, dripping 1 tsp oil or butter to 1 lb nuts over them. Shake until they are coated, then place nuts in a moderate oven until the shells and skins can be removed easily. Or place chestnuts in cold water to cover. Bring it to the boiling point and boil the nuts for 5 minutes. Drain them and remove the shells and skins. Or place chestnuts in cold water to cover. Bring the water to the boiling point, and then boil the chestnuts for 30 minutes. Plunge them into cold water. Remove the hulls and skins. The nuts should be sufficiently tender to put through a puree strainer. If not, cover them with boiling water and cook until tender. Or, roast chestnuts using the following instructions.

Roasted Chestnuts

To roast chestnuts, make a slit on one side of each nut with a sharp knife. Place them in a casserole dish with a tight fitting cover or wrap them securely in a sheet of heavy foil. Roast at 450°F for 35 to 40 minutes. Peel chestnuts while the chestnuts are hot, by removing and discarding each shell and the papery skin.

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Chestnuts are highly perishable and should be refrigerated to prevent mold from developing. Refrigerate them in a plastic bag with a few holes for up to two weeks freeze them for several months.

While UCCE Master Food Preserver public classes have ended for the season in El Dorado County, monthly classes continue in Amador and Calaveras counties. Check out their schedule at <http://ucanr.edu/mfpcs>. El Dorado County Master Food Preserver free public classes will resume next summer.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are also available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the UCCE Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our international E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpenews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!