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## Fresh Chestnuts Roasting them; Peeling them; Putting them in the Stuffing

November 14, 2009 @ 9:09 pm • Filed under [All Recipes:Around the House:Holidays and Celebrations](#)



Fresh chestnuts, roasted and peeled

Ok, It's *finally* time for chestnuts, an autumn/early winter thrill that's one of the last truly seasonal crops still standing. If you're anything like me, you're just about jumping up and down with glee right there in the produce section. But if you're like I used to be, your joy is tempered by the knowledge that they're a royal pain to prepare.

They needn't be, as it turns out. I now eat more than is probably wise, having discovered a couple of tricks that lessen the pain considerably. I still haven't found an *easy* way to go from raw in the shell to skinless roasted, but with these methods it's easy enough to make me glad they're low-fat.

### PREPARING FRESH CHESTNUTS

The first rule is to buy more than you need. All bulk chestnuts, no matter how fancy, will include some that are moldy or wormy and in my experience no amount of in-store inspection is enough to guarantee they will all be sound. Keep them cold until needed; they won't spoil at room temperature but they will start drying out.

The next step is the first royal pain part: each chestnut shell must be cut through, aka scored, on the flat side. This keeps the nut from exploding in the oven and, because the shell contracts, provides a place to start peeling from. Classic way of doing it is to use a small, very sharp knife to cut an X.

Chestnuts being hard, small and round, X-cutting was fraught with hazard for the first roughly 40 years of my chestnut-roasting life. But then I met the chestnutter, which helped enormously, and then I figured out – duh! – that you can simply soak the tough shells into knife-receptive tenderness.

### **The chestnutter:**



(At left: talk about a specialized tool!)

You put a chestnut in the hopper, close lid one, then close lid two – in theory just firmly enough to score the shell without damaging the nut..

(Below: chestnut ready to be scored)



Works like a charm – if you have strong hands. That first view isn't a distortion. For reasons best known to themselves the manufacturers have made the top handle shorter than the others, so it can be difficult to get a good grip.

Plus you've got to give it a pretty firm squeeze but not so firm a squeeze you drive the cutter deep into the flesh of the nut. But all that said it does do the job, quickly and reliably. Available from [Fante's](#),\* among others.

### **Soaking:**

Simplicity itself. Put the chestnuts in a deep, heatproof bowl. Pour on enough boiling water to cover generously and let them sit for an hour or two. Score them one at a time, leaving the others in the water until wanted. ( Especially in the beginning of the season when the nuts are fresh and (for chestnuts) juicy, it's best to let them dry out again a bit after scoring, before you put them in the oven. Exposed inner membrane has to dry to brittleness as they roast.)

## ROASTING

In my experience the open fire is more a romantic fantasy than a good idea. There's a reason street vendors are always surrounded by an acrid effluvium of incinerated shell, and having a chestnut roasting pan – also available at Fante's – doesn't really help.

But if you're determined to try and the "open fire" is an actual fire, not the flame on the top of the stove, you'll need a pan with a very long handle. They sell 'em at [Spitjack](#) – where, please be warned, I have never shopped. Watch out for ebay, where I just saw several antique chestnut roasters with oh please good grief wooden handles.

We do roast chestnuts on top of the woodstove (covered by an overturned pan) for social eating, but in the oven is the way to go if you need more than a few. One layer in a jellyroll pan at 375 for about 15 minutes. Shake the pan once or twice to turn them. Many recipes say to oil the pan but for the life of me I can't think why – it seems very unlikely to boost heat transfer and it's not as if they'd stick.

## BOILING

Reader Greenpa (see comments) sent along this link to a [chestnut peeling video](#) that offers a vast improvement over X-cutting when what you need – or can use well enough – is halved semi- raw peeled nuts. Having now tried it I can offer the following refinements: The nuts are parboiled whole, then halved, and about 2 minutes at a low bubble seems to do the job; I tried 5 minutes first and it was too long. Halving across the equator works better than scar-to-tip. Also, it's easiest to apply the pliers at an angle.

Whether you start with parboiled peeled or X'd whole; boiling is a misnomer. **Whole:** Start them in cold water to cover generously, bring it just to the boil, then turn the heat to simmer and cook for 12 to 15 minutes, depending on size and freshness. It's best to err on the side of undercooking so they don't crumble when you peel them. **Parboiled:** Simmer gently for about 5 minutes or use directly in stew, stir-fry or whatever. Being both skinned and halved, they're ready to absorb the flavor of whatever they're cooked in

## PEELING

The other half of the royal pain, because whether the chestnut is roasted or boiled, peeling presents the same challenge. There is no getting around the fact that the hotter the chestnut, the easier it is to remove the disagreeable inner skin. It helps to score generously before cooking.

Work with a few at a time, leaving the remainder in the turned-off oven or pot of water. If you hold the nut in a tea towel and use only one hand to work on peel removal, finger burning can be kept to a minimum. This is not a good job for men. Why they're more sensitive to the heat I don't know. I only know it's true and not a cover for weaseling out of being helpful. (It isn't true for chefs; they have to have abesestos fingers.)

*Social Note:* According to reports I've been unable to verify, people in the rural Midwest and upper South used to employ roasting chestnuts for a kissing game. Cut only a small vent hole in the concave side of each nut and place them in the fire, keeping track of whose is whose. The person whose chestnut pops first gets to kiss whoever they want. Best thing to be doing with your mouth if that's what you did to your chestnut (see "roasting," above).

Oh, the stuffing. Don't be stingy.

\*Disclaimer: The folks who own Fante's are friends. There are many reasons to like them. One of the reasons is that they run a really terrific cookware store.

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15 Comments »

Greenpa Said,

November 26, 2009 @ 12:15 pm

There is, REALLY, a far simpler way now! Take a look at badgersett.com.

Leslie Said,

November 27, 2009 @ 12:00 am

Hi Greenpa

Thanks so much for pointing everyone to the nifty badgersett video (and website in general). That looks like a terrific way to peel what they describe and show as "halved, parboiled" chestnuts. Makes perfect sense as soon as you see it since it's almost the same principle as blanching almonds: drop the raw almonds in boiling water, let them sit a minute and the nuts will pop right out of the skins when you squeeze them between your fingers. No more fussing with boiled chestnuts – unless they have to be whole. Now here's hoping they come up with something as easy for peeling the roasted ones!

Anne Bloomenthal Said,

December 13, 2009 @ 2:30 pm

Based on adapting the suggestions above, I found that peeling chestnuts can be much easier than past experiences (requiring no special implements). If you're OK with ending up with halves (and some crumbles) of boiled chestnuts (instead of whole roasted ones), here are instructions, based on what I did:

- \* pour boiling water over them, let them sit about 1 hour
- \* cut them in half (I didn't see any consistent difference between lengthwise or crosswise)
- \* boil for about 8 minutes (I did 10 minutes from start to finish, don't know how long it actually took to get to boiling)
- \* remove from water with tongs, place on dishtowel
- \* grab shell "from behind" with dishtowel, block front with tongs, squeeze gently

Many will simply pop right out. If not, both the outer and inner shells are much more flexible and easy to handle than from roasting (and not as hot on the fingers). When they get harder to peel, reheat to boiling again

Damead Said,

December 26, 2010 @ 9:11 pm

I – a sensitive-fingered man – have a theory why the designer made the business handle of the chestnutter shorter. If I were using it, after inserting the chestnut, I'd put the cutter on a cutting board short handle down and

press down on the big handle. You get great leverage using your upper body weight instead of a powerful grip. You probably could cut the chestnut into quarters if the blade were long enough.

Hi Damead,

Welcome to the blog and thanks for the interesting idea. I'm sure it would work fine and might be a great solution for anyone, male or female, who had arthritic hands – me, for instance, more and more as the years go by. But I'm afraid no improvement on the chestnutter will help in the sensitivity department; the nuts will still need to be peeled while hot, which is where women (and chefs) seem to have an advantage.

Leslie

George Said,

November 19, 2011 @ 8:32 am

I find that making the x is easiest (and safest) using an electric knife.

Welcome, George, and thanks for the tip; I knew there had to be SOMETHING electric knives were good for!

Claudia Said,

November 24, 2011 @ 8:37 am

Many years ago I came up with a stuffing recipe that included chestnuts. Ever since then I have been looking for ways to make shelling chestnuts easier. A few years ago my brother gave me a chestnutter. I have looked up ways online to relieve the chestnuts of their shells ever since. Yours is the first one I came across that makes sense and looks like it will make life easier for me at Thanksgiving time. If they didn't make my stuffing taste so much better I would have given up on them years ago. Shelling chestnuts will never be easy, only easier (perhaps). My chestnuts are soaking now. (I have bookmarked this page.)

Welcome, Claudia,

Happy Thanksgiving! May your chestnut peeling be easy and quick! One further refinement I have to/will add to the soak trick: Especially in the beginning of the season when the nuts are fresh and (for chestnuts) juicy, it's best to let them dry out again a bit after scoring before you put them in the oven. Exposed inner membrane has to dry out – before the nuts do – as they roast.

Paula Said,

November 18, 2012 @ 12:17 pm

My chestnuts roasted..I have peeled them but some are hard as rocks? Did I over cook and are they ruined if I did...wish I had read your article first I did not soak them just scored them with kitchen shears and put them in 250 oven for 30 minutes....southern girl here...first go at chestnuts because I had the most amazing chestnut soup in California and wanted to make some for Thanksgiving...

Hi Paula, welcome to the blog. And welcome to wherever you've landed that put you next to some fresh chestnuts!

In answer to both of your comment questions:

"Bread that has been soaked and wrung out" should probably be "soaked and pressed out"; you don't really wring it like laundry :). But the idea is to wind up with a damp sponge texture: the bread is moistened clear through but not dripping wet.

As for the chestnuts, I'm afraid this batch probably IS beyond repair – scoring with kitchen shears is no problem but the long cooking time at low temperature has dried them out instead of roasting them. You might be able to rescue the dried ones by simmering them gently in a mixture of water and milk (three times as much water

as milk) until they softened up, but I wouldn't guarantee it. Best thing to do is try again, knowing what you know now. Chestnut soup for Thanksgiving sounds like a delicious idea to me and once you get the hang of it I know you'll be a total convert!

Claudia Said,

November 24, 2011 @ 11:15 am

FYI – I will share my stuffing recipe:

Sourdough French bread toasted, wetted and wrung out.

Sauteed celery, onions and mushrooms

Raisins

Chestnuts

Egg

Sherry

Melted butter

Salt and pepper

The amounts of above depend on size of bird. Don't stuff bird too tightly. Bake rest in separate baking dish.

Paula Said,

November 18, 2012 @ 12:14 pm

What do you mean bread wetted and wrung out?

Hi Paula, wetted bread answered along with your other question (above)

Andreas Cöhrssen Said,

April 18, 2012 @ 7:34 pm

After the cross cut and roast, I held the chestnut with a potholder with the left hand and used a small cake fork to break up the shell around the chestnut. Once there was a free space, the small fork curved nicely around the chestnut and I could lever the shells off without burning those sensitive male hands.

Hi Andreas,

That certainly sounds like a novel solution, and I confess I'm having trouble envisioning the fork, but as the saying goes: whatever works.

Melinda Parsons Said,

November 17, 2012 @ 6:15 pm

Hi Leslie,

Wonderful post on chestnuts. Have never known quite what to do with them; now I do.

May I list your blog on my new blog for Red Hill Farm CSA under "blogs I follow"? Thank you, I'm just getting started with blogging, in this case for the CSA farm run by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia.

Hi Melinda, glad the post has raised your chestnut-awareness. I love them so I want everyone else to, too. As for your request, you don't really need permission but by all means, feel free. I'd be honored to be on your "blogs I follow" list!

Melinda Parsons Said,

November 28, 2012 @ 11:55 am

Thanks Leslie!

Jeff Utigard Said,  
November 21, 2012 @ 1:53 pm  
Leslie,

Last year my wife roasted the nuts, peeled them herself and when I came home from TD shopping calmly said, "the chestnuts are done...". I was amazed but silent on her technique or her process as for the last 25 plus years, we did the boil, pry bar out the crumbling mealy meat technique...

This year she showed me your method and despite burned pinkies (I used the hot pad) the shelled nuts are in a bowl awaiting their part in the turkey dressing for tomorrow...

Thank you^10... keep up your good work, next year I get her a chestnutter...  
regards from the mile high city,  
Jeff

Best regards right back to you, Jeff. Have a very happy – and chestnut filled! – turkey day. For what it's worth, this year, I just did the boiling water, soak the shells routine and it worked almost as well as the chestnutter. Big advantage was that I was able to do it all myself; arthritic hands mean that husband Bill is now the only one who can use the gizmo. He doesn't mind, (I still do all the roasting and peeling), but it is convenient not to have to depend on him.

Tati Carra Said,  
January 2, 2013 @ 1:42 pm

I scored mine with a knife (you should have good knife skills, ie, keep fingertips clear), placed them in a small foil loaf pan, covered loosely with foil and put them on top of my wood burning stove, which I figured correctly was hot enough to roast them. Not quite roasted on an open fire, but cozy nonetheless, and the living room smelled like roasted chestnuts at Christmas. Of course, peeling them while hot was another story.

Hi Tati, I couldn't agree more: Three cheers for wood burning stoves! Roast the chestnuts, perfume the living room, keep things cosy... if you have to have hot hands, at least they're hot in a nice environment.

Robin 5280 Said,  
January 26, 2013 @ 12:14 pm

It's amazing to me how many people love chestnuts here in the US. I remember getting them in the fall in Japan as a child. It has always been a tasty comfort food eaten straight out of the shell. I have tried several different ways to replicate what was available for me as a child. Can't do it. This year I found an Asian grocer who will "peel" them fresh in a large grinder-like machine. Most of the skin is off as is all of the shell. Now what would you do to roast these without them coming out like bricks like my first batch?

Robin

Hi Robin,

Thanks so much for writing! This is a very interesting story and it leaves me with a couple of questions too. The first is about the childhood comfort food Is it the preparation that's different or do you think the chestnuts themselves were a different variety? And please tell us where that Asian grocer is; I've never heard of a peeling machine that was inexpensive enough for an individual store to afford.

As for your roasting question, getting raw nuts nicely soft without the protection of the shell may take a bit of fiddling around. I've never tried it, but I'd start with a foil package: Put a large sheet of foil on a baking pan, dip each nut in cold water and set it on the foil, crowding them but keeping them in a single layer. Fold up the foil to make an airtight package. Roast at 350 for ?? I'd start with 10 minutes, open the package (being careful to avoid steam burns) and check with a knife point. That should give an idea of how much longer they'll take. I've never used the little ceramic doodads sold as garlic roasters, but using one of them might work too.

If the foil thing doesn't work, next idea would be to steam them until soft, coat lightly with butter or oil and then roast. Uncovered you'd get a crust, which might or might not be tender; covered would (presumably) keep them soft throughout.

Hope to hear from you again, good luck with the roasting!

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<http://leslieland.com/2009/11/fresh-chestnuts-%E2%80%93-roasting-them-peeling-them-putting-them-in-the-stuffing/>

# Dried Chestnuts – From Soup to Dessert, with recipe stops at Stir-Fried Red Cabbage and White Chocolate Candy

December 15, 2009 @ 11:51 am • Filed under [All Recipes:kitchen:Cakes, Pies, Cookies and Pastry:kitchen:Soups, Salads, Sauces and Snacks:Tips:kitchen:Vegetables](#)



On right, fresh chestnuts. On left, one of the all-time convenience ingredients: peeled, skinned and ready to go, as easy to cook as dried beans.

Admittedly, dried chestnuts don't have the mashed potato fluffiness of the [fresh article](#). Somewhere between mealy and creamy is about the best they can do. But other than that they're just shortcut chestnuts: great in soups and stews and stuffings, great with winter vegetables and great in holiday sweets and why they aren't more widely adored is a mystery to me.



Sweet Snowballs (chestnut and white chocolate candy) recipe at the end of the post.

Dried chestnuts and I got married many years ago, when I read somewhere that you could cook them along with brown rice to spiff it up for company. No company necessary; this is a sauce-mop we eat all the time. Just throw in a handful of nuts and add double the chestnut volume of water along with the water for the rice.

Once discovered, they started appearing as the base note in vegetable puree soups, in place of potatoes in chicken stew (hold the carrots or it'll be too sweet), curried with cauliflower as a meatless main dish and in other locations too numerous.

Most frequent use: cook in water until soft; brown lightly in butter, olive oil or duckfat and mix with whatever winter vegetable happens to be on hand – Brussels sprouts, broccoli, kale, cauliflower, squash... They're also delicious in green salads: crumble and let soak in the vinaigrette for a little while before proceeding.

## DEALING WITH DRIED CHESTNUTS

1. Not all of them are perfect; before using, check for worm holes or other insect damage and discard any that look suspicious.

(1a) Soak for a few hours in cold water if you have the time. Bad nuts will float; cooking will go faster, and – there goes the convenience part – after soaking you can take a toothpick and winkle out the little bits of remaining skin. Not essential. I don't bother with the rice, for instance.

2. Dried chestnuts can be cooked in any thin, non-acid liquid: water, broth – even milk if they've first been soaked overnight in water to cover. Allow 2 cups liquid for each cup of chestnuts if they will be cooked tightly covered, a bit more if some liquid is likely to cook away. Avoid acids like orange and tomato juice unless heavily diluted or you'll have leather instead of velvet.

3. In water, cooking time is generally about an hour. The richer the liquid, the longer they'll take. Chestnuts in milk can take two hours or more to soften properly. Always check by breaking a few open, sometimes nuts that test tender with a knife point are still tough inside.

## RED CABBAGE AND CHESTNUTS REVISITED



Standard recipes for this winter classic call for fresh chestnuts and long simmering, often in red wine. You wind up with a very tasty dish that's also very rich and soft, not exactly an ideal partner for the heavy meats – roast duck, smoked pork loin, etc. – with which it's traditionally served. In this fresher tasting version only the chestnuts get the long simmer; the cabbage is more or less stir-fried.

For 6 to 8 servings:

6 oz dried chestnuts, about 1 c.

2 1/3 c. unsalted chicken broth

1 small onion, halved root to tip, then sliced into thin shreds

2 lbs red cabbage, about 1/2 large head, cored and sliced into 1/4 inch ribbons

a 1-inch cube of peeled fresh ginger, shredded on the fine holes of the grater

2 large garlic cloves, shredded as the ginger

2 tbl. red wine vinegar, or to taste

salt

(2 or 3 tablespoons chicken, duck or bacon fat, semi-optional)

1. Combine the chestnuts with the broth in a deep, heavy saucepan and simmer partially covered over very low heat, stirring from time to time, until the chestnuts are completely softened, about an hour and a quarter. Add hot water if broth cooks away so much chestnuts become uncovered.

2. Remove chestnuts with a slotted spoon and reserve. Boil liquid to reduce to a scant 1/2 cup.

3. Transfer the reduced broth to a wok or large saute pan and add the onion, cabbage, ginger and garlic. Cook over high heat, stirring almost constantly, until the vegetables are crisp-tender and the broth has almost cooked away, about 5 minutes.

4. Stir in the chestnuts and keep cooking just long enough to reheat them, then add the vinegar and a bit of salt. Taste. Adjust. This recipe is essentially fat free, so if it tastes flat in spite of adjustment that may well be why. Consider adding a bit of fat before upping the sour and salt.

**Variation(s).** This is often pushed with sugar and vinegar until it's sweet and sour. Caraway seeds are a favorite seasoning, caraway and cabbage being like a horse and carriage. If you want to use them, omit the ginger,

## **SWEET SNOWBALLS**

(Chestnut and white chocolate candies)

For about 30:

3 oz dried chestnuts, about 1/2 c.

a 2-inch length of vanilla bean

1 1/2 c. low-fat (1 1/2 %) milk

6 oz white chocolate, chopped

tiny pinch of salt

granulated sugar for coating

1. Put the chestnuts in a deep bowl, cover with cold water and soak for 14 to 18 hours. Drain. Pick out any bits of skin.

2. Split the vanilla bean and combine it with the milk in a small, deep, heavy saucepan. Add the chestnuts, partially cover the pan and cook over very low heat until completely soft, about 2 hours. The milk should barely shudder, lower the heat if it threatens to simmer or, heaven forefend, boil. Stir occasionally, removing any skin that has formed. The milk will gradually thicken. If it gets thicker than heavy cream before the chestnuts are done, add a little water

3. Let the cooked chestnuts cool in the milk, then remove them with a slotted spoon and puree through a food mill or in a processor. Rinse the bean and set aside for reuse. Save the small amount of semi-caramelized milk to add to creamed spinach, carrot soup, mashed sweet potatoes, etc.

4. Melt the chocolate in the microwave or over hot water, then mix with the chestnuts and salt. Chill until firm.

5. Cover a cookie sheet with waxed paper, then distribute the chilled mixture on it in teaspoon sized dabs. Again chill until firm, then roll the dabs into balls and roll the balls in granulated sugar.

Allow the Snowballs to sit uncovered in a cool, dry place for several hours or overnight. The sugar will form a light crust. Store in one or two layers in an airtight container in a cool place for up to about a week. After 2 days or so, the crust will soften and the chestnut color will tint the sugar, turning the Snowballs into Sandballs, but they'll still look and taste fine.

**Buying Dried Chestnuts:** Some natural food stores carry them in bulk. Some Italian deli's carry imported ones in bags. There are many online sources, none of which I've ever used so you're pretty much on your own there. But I will say even a brief look showed prices ranging from 12.00 per pound (for organic colossal) to 22.00 per pound (for size and growing method unspecified). Last batch I bought at the deli – last year, I bought many bags – cost I think \$8.00 per pound. Just sayin'.

# Marrons Glacés – Home Made At Last!

December 23, 2009 @ 2:47 pm • Filed under [All Recipes:kitchen:Cakes, Pies, Cookies and Pastry:Around the House:Holidays and Celebrations](#)

Sorta – These velvety sweet chestnuts in a crunchy sugar shell aren't *quite* as light-textured as the real deal, but they're good enough to be a variation instead of simply an earnest attempt, and now that the candied chestnuts of my childhood have hit about \$5.00 each they're a variant well worth making. (Assuming, of course, that marrons glacés are on your list of "wish I could afford more.")



Left: Marrons glaces en chemise. Right: Glazed candied chestnuts

Although fresh chestnuts can be used, it's far easier to start out with IQF peeled chestnuts (see below). The processing that delivers them whole, absolutely skinless and in a neither-cooked-nor-raw state is probably something we don't want to know too much about;\* but whatever it is has the happy side-effect of making them much more receptive to candying and much less likely to break.

As you know if you've ever tried this or been on the Christmas list of somebody who has, all those recipes floating around the internet are lying: starting with fresh chestnuts is fraught with difficulty, most of it starting *after* you get the nuts peeled and skinned. They have to be cooked before they go into the syrup or they turn to leather. Cooked chestnuts have a deep-seated need to fall apart. And then turn to leather, often as not.

The website of [Clément Faugier](#), source of the marrons glacés of my youth – and that of most other people born after 1882 – describes a method of manufacture that cannot be emulated at home. Never mind the number of steps (16), one of which is wrapping the cooked nuts in little squares of tulle to keep them from falling apart, the real problem is that home kitchens are not equipped with the stainless steel baskets, giant vacuum cookers, mobile grills and drying tunnels used by the professionals.

All that being the case, it's kind of amazing how close you can come – and it doesn't take days and days, either.

## Home made *marrons glacés*

Ingredients:

lots of simple syrup: equal volumes sugar and water, the former dissolved in the latter and simmered for 3 or 4 minutes. Let it cool to room temperature before proceeding.

4 or so inch length of vanilla bean, split

Chestnuts, the bigger the better. Some will break and a few will have to be broken for testing so be sure to start with plenty

(Egg white, for *en chemise*, or

A candy thermometer, for glazed)

### With IQF chestnuts:

1. Thaw and rinse. Place in a deep, heavy saucepan with the vanilla and about 4 times as much syrup as nuts (by volume).
2. Slowly bring to barely a simmer, cover the pan and cook over the lowest possible heat until the nuts are semi translucent and seem to be soft when poked with a toothpick, about an hour and a half. If they're not ready, keep cooking until they are.
3. Cut open and taste a sample nut – it should be completely soft and sweetened right to the heart. It may or may not be completely translucent.
4. Drain the nuts and place the whole ones on a rack over a shallow pan. (Reserve the bits and the syrup.) Heat oven to 300, turn it off, put in the chestnuts and let them dry, turning once or twice. The goal is a dull surface that is not tacky, produced as quickly as possible without actually baking the nuts and toughening them. Repeat the oven routine if necessary.
5. Store the dry nuts in an airtight container in a cold place. After 10 days or so they'll form an uneven sugar coating that's too thin to be really crunchy. For that, finish *en chemise* or with

glaze, any time after they're dry but shortly before serving. Pieces can stay in the syrup in the fridge or canned, ready to pour over ice cream or whatever.

### **With Fresh Chestnuts:**

1. Begin by piggily standing there in the store choosing the very largest, firmest chestnuts in the bin – Faugier uses nuts that run 45 to 60 a kilo.
2. Soak the chestnuts in cold water for a few hours to soften the shells, then score the shells in several places with a sharp knife – in addition to the traditional x on one side, give them a few slits all the way around. Be careful to avoid cutting into the nut itself.
3. Put the nuts in cold water, bring just to the boil and cook for 2 to 4 minutes, depending on size. The goal is to loosen the shell and skin and soften a very thin layer of the actual chestnut.
4. Peel the chestnuts with a very sharp knife, not only removing shell and skin but also exposing most of the inner flesh, as though you were peeling a potato. For some reason exposing them this way lets you cook them – carefully! -in syrup without getting the leather effect. While you're at it, try to trim so they're all about the same size and can cook in the same amount of time. This matters more with the fresh ones than the IQF's (as far as I can tell).
5. Place in a deep, heavy saucepan with the vanilla and about 4 times as much syrup as nuts (by volume).
6. Slowly bring to barely a simmer, cover the pan and cook over the lowest possible heat for 45 minutes. The surface should remain placid throughout this time; *do not let them boil*. Turn off the heat, cover the pan and let them sit overnight.
7. Again bring to the bare simmer and keep cooking super slowly until the nuts are semi translucent and seem to be soft when poked with a toothpick, about an hour and a half. Proceed as in steps 3-5 above.

### **CANDIED CHESTNUTS *EN CHEMISE***

Probably tastier than glazed and a great deal easier to make, just less impressive visually.

1. Start in the evening. Heat the oven to 300. Stir some egg white just to loosen, trying to avoid introducing air bubbles. Put a sheet of tinfoil shiny side up on a cookie sheet and set out a plate of sugar or vanilla sugar.
2. Dip each nut or large nut piece in egg white, draining it well so it's barely coated. Roll in the sugar to coat completely and place on the foil. Put them in the oven, turn off the heat and let them dry overnight. Store uncovered in a dry place for up to a week. How long the coating lasts in its crunchy state is a function of residual moisture and ambient humidity, so if you want these for a party it's a good idea to coat them only a day or two ahead.

## GLAZED CANDIED CHESTNUTS

Sugar work. Oh joy. But it isn't really that hard; just be sure to choose a dry day and someone you really need to impress.

1. Prepare: Put a sheet of tinfoil shiny side up on a cookie sheet. Have the dry whole chestnuts sitting on a rack. If you have a candy dipping fork, find it. Otherwise use a carving fork. (Plain forks work fine, but the close tines get gummed up with syrup quickly so you'll probably need more than one). Find or make a double boiler with a deep upper pan. Fill the bottom pan with boiling water then keep it hot.
2. Remove the vanilla bean from the reserved chestnut syrup, pour the syrup into the upper pan and insert the candy thermometer. Add enough additional syrup to generously cover the bulb of the thermometer. Boil to just below hard crack, @290 degrees. ( Temperature will keep climbing after pan is removed from heat)
3. Put the syrup pan in the waiting hot water to keep warm. Dip the chestnuts and place them on the foil – you can do about 10 before the foreign material makes the syrup sugar up; make an extra pan of clean caramel if you want to do a lot of them. They should keep at least overnight if the chestnuts were dry enough to begin with and there's not much moisture in the air but if you're going to all this trouble it's probably safest to make them no more than a few hours before serving, just to be on the safe side.

### Chestnut or Marron – is there a difference?

Not botanically or at least not at the grocery store. American chestnuts are *Castanea dentata*, and a lot of commercial chestnuts grown in the US are Chinese chestnuts, *C. mollissima*, but anything coming from Europe is likely to be *C. sativa*, the European chestnut, or a hybrid thereof. And that's where the marrons come in. Just as a perfect Red Delicious apple has come quite a way from the wild thing by the roadside, so the marron types have been bred to be bigger than other chestnuts, less inclined to have 2 nuts in the shell and, bless them, be smoother, with fewer deep folds for the skin to get wedged into.

The price for all this is a tree that bears later and produces smaller crops when it's finally old enough, which helps explain why marrons are the priciest chestnuts.

The Clement Fougier site promises an English version shortly but meanwhile the [translated version](#) is a lot of fun in its own way.

### Buying IQF chestnuts

The ones I used are from [Chestnut Growers Inc.](#) and the reason I buried them all the way down here is that the ones I used were sent to me by a chef friend, so I can't vouch for Chestnut Growers' customer service or the quality of its chestnuts compared to other brands.

### More about Chestnuts

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of a 3-part series. Part 1 was about [fresh chestnuts](#) and Part 2 celebrated the [dried ones](#), a terrific convenience food that should be better known.

\* **Update:** Just got the call to Chestnut Growers returned: Representative Corey Allen says the (imported from Italy) peeling machine uses a combination of intense heat, steam and brushing to peel and skin the chestnuts.

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<http://leslieland.com/2009/12/marrons-glaces-%E2%80%93-home-made-at-last/>

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We miss our dear friend Leslie

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LAND--Leslie, 66, of Cushing, ME, and Pleasant Valley, NY, died August 10 due to complications from metastatic breast cancer. Champion of country cooking, ambitious gardener, and, in her own words, "the latest in a long line of garden advisers that stretches back, approximately, to Adam, who we can be sure was frequently asked about the niceties of apple culture." In her syndicated "Good Food" column, four books, scores of magazine articles, and 400 Garden Q&A columns for the New York Times, Leslie wrote about food and gardening with wit and authority. She cooked at Chez Panisse in the early 1970s, then decamped for rural Maine where she built a new life as a writer. Leslie published two cookbooks, "Reading Between the Recipes" and "The Modern Country Cook," was an editor at Yankee magazine, and co-wrote "The 3,000 Mile Garden," which became a PBS series. She also edited "1000 Gardening Questions and Answers," based on the New York Times column. Leslie leaves her husband, Bill Bakaitis, daughter Celia, granddaughter Ursula, sister Claudia, brother David, a niece, two nephews, and countless friends she inspired to love gardening, good food, and life.

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