

Chestnuts

Chestnuts are quite different from other nuts nutritionally and in a culinary sense. They have a sweet, nutty taste but a texture similar to a firm baked potato rather than the crunchy texture of other nuts. Nutritionally **chestnuts** are more like a wholegrain than a nut as they are low in fat, contain protein and are a good source of low glycemic index (GI) carbohydrate and dietary fibre. While they are a source of the similar vitamins and minerals found in other nuts, their high water content means the concentration of these nutrients is less. **Chestnut** season is from mid March to June and they are generally sold fresh, frozen or ground as chestnut meal. A standard serve of **chestnuts** is equivalent to about 30g or around four **chestnuts**.



Nutrition and health benefits of chestnuts

Like other nuts, chestnuts have a number of health benefits, making them a worthwhile addition to your diet:

- **A good source of low GI carbohydrate** – chestnut meal has been GI tested with a low to moderate GI value of 54.¹ While whole chestnuts have yet to be tested we can assume since the ground chestnut meal is low GI, whole chestnuts will also be low GI. In general the finer the particles being tested the higher the GI. Low GI chestnuts are a good choice for people with diabetes, impaired glucose

tolerance and insulin resistance. They make a great tasty alternative to high GI potatoes.

- **Gluten-free** – while all nuts are gluten-free, chestnuts can be ground into a meal which is a great replacement in baked products for those with Coeliac disease or gluten intolerance. Coeliac disease is a condition that requires a lifelong change to diet removing all sources of gluten. Chestnut and other nut meals as ingredients help provide variety to these diets. Since gluten free diets are more likely to have a high GI, nuts in general help lower the GI of these diets.
- **A source of dietary fibre** – roasted chestnuts provide around 2g of fibre per 30g serve^{2,3} or a similar amount as in a slice of wholegrain bread. Particularly important for those with Coeliac disease who often don't get enough fibre in the diet.
- **Low in total fat and saturated fat** – unlike other nuts, chestnuts contain less than 1g of total fat per 100g, making them a tasty addition to a healthy, balanced low in saturated fat diet.³
- **Rich source of vitamin C** – chestnuts are the only “nuts” that contain vitamin C with about 8mg in a 30g serve of roasted product or 20% of the RDI for vitamin C. The amount of vitamin C decreases by a third after heating.⁶
- **Very low in sodium and contains potassium**, similar to other nuts.³ A low sodium, high potassium diet has benefits for blood pressure and heart health.⁴

Buying and storage tips

When buying chestnuts, look for even-sized nuts which feel heavy for their size, with undamaged, firm shells. Due to their high moisture content (they are almost 50% water) chestnuts can dry out easily. If storing them for more than a day or two, place in a plastic bag to help retain their moisture. They should be stored as near as possible to 0°C. With proper storage chestnuts can remain in good condition for a few weeks.

How to prepare and cook chestnuts⁵

If you have never had the pleasure of eating “roasted chestnuts from an open fire” it's time you tried them.

Top tip

Before cooking, the most important step is to cut the shell to prevent the nut exploding while cooking. Some people cut a slit across the face of the nut, others cut a cross into the flat-end.

To bake: Preheat oven to 200°C. Place chestnuts onto a baking tray and bake for 15–20 minutes or until shell split opens.

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Nutrient content of roasted chestnuts³

Nutrient	Per 100g
Energy (kJ)	724
Protein (g)	3.4
Fat, total (g)	0.6
Fat, saturated (g)	0.1
Fat, monounsaturated (g)	n/a
Fat, polyunsaturated (g)	n/a
Carbohydrate, total (g)	34.3
Carbohydrate, sugars (g)	3.8
Dietary fibre (g)	8.1
Sodium (mg)	1.0
Potassium (mg)	574
Magnesium (mg)	33
Calcium (mg)	13
Phosphorus (mg)	107
Iron (mg)	0.8
Zinc (mg)	0.5
Copper (mg)	0.5
Manganese (mg)	1.2
Folate (ug)	70
Vitamin C ⁶	26

For further information on the nutritional benefits of nuts and recipes visit www.nutsforlife.com.au and www.nuthealth.org or follow us @nutsforlife and like us facebook.com/nuts4life

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To microwave: Place chestnuts in a single layer on a microwave-safe plate. Cook, uncovered, on 850 watts/High/100% for 4–6 minutes or until flesh is tender.

To roast, grill or barbecue: Cook, turning occasionally, in a pan over medium heat for 20–30 minutes or until shell split opens

To boil (if using to puree): Place chestnuts into a pan of cold water, bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 15–20 minutes or until flesh is tender.

Wrap the cooked chestnuts in a tea-towel for 10 minutes to provide steam which helps with the peeling process. Then remove outer shell and inner skin while still warm (they're tricky to peel once cooled).

8 ways to include chestnuts in your diet

- Enjoy freshly roasted chestnuts over the fire as the perfect winter pre-dinner snack.
- Use roasted chestnuts in place of potato at evening meals.
- Add them to your favourite pumpkin soup recipe for a tasty change.
- Whole or chopped chestnuts make a tasty addition to your favourite stir-fry.
- Use ground chestnuts in place of flour to make wheat or gluten-free cakes.
- Combine with onion, garlic, your favourite herbs, fresh breadcrumbs and an egg to make a stuffing for your Sunday roast.
- Pureed chestnuts make a tasty soufflé.
- Add roasted chestnuts to mushroom risotto.

References

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Turkey buffe with wild rice and nut stuffing

3kg turkey buffe (about 2kg of meat)
2 teaspoons canola margarine salt reduced
1 clove garlic, crushed
4 cups (175g) baby spinach leaves, chopped roughly
4 shallots, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped dill
2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
¼ cup currants
½ cup roughly chopped peeled chestnuts*
¼ cup chopped brazil nuts
¼ cup chopped walnuts
½ cup cooked wild rice
1½ cups cooked brown rice
2 eggs, lightly beaten

Preheat oven to 175°C. Wash and dry turkey inside and out. Place on a rack in a large baking tray.

Melt the canola margarine in a large non stick frying pan. Cook the garlic, spinach and shallots. Cool then combine with other ingredients and spoon into a 12-hole muffin tin lightly sprayed with cooking oil spray. Press the mixture into the muffin holes well. Refrigerate until needed.

Bake the turkey buffe for 30 mins per 500g bird weight. Cover if it is browning too quickly. Remove and allow to rest for 15–20 minutes.

Whilst the turkey is resting, bake the stuffing muffins for 15–20 minutes until firm and slightly golden. Serve sliced turkey with stuffing.

Note: To remove the chestnuts from their skin, use a small sharp knife to carefully cut an 'X' on the flat side of each nut. Steam over a pan of boiling water for 8–10 minutes or until the skin starts to open up around the 'X' and come away from the flesh. Remove from the heat and plunge nuts into a bowl of iced water, then drain. The skin can now be peeled off the flesh.

Alternatively, prepare the nuts as above but simmer in a pan of boiling water for 6–8 minutes.

Serves 12 – 12g nuts per serve (⅓ of a handful)

NUTRIENTS per serve – 12 serves (250g per serve)

Energy 1350kJ, Protein 40g, Fat 11g (Saturated fat 3g), Carbohydrate 14g, Sugars 3g, Fibre 2g, Sodium 420mg

