



The quest began after my husband ate roasted chestnuts at a German market — it was love at first bite. Every autumn, we search for restaurants and fests showcasing the seasonal snack. Visit just one of these events to find out why there's such a fuss about chestnuts.



By Genevieve Northup

The Quest for Chestnuts

What are Chestnuts?

Before moving to *Deutschland*, my only knowledge of chestnuts involved the lyrics of a favorite Christmas tune. In the United States, chestnut trees faced extinction in the early 20th century and remain rare in much of the country. But they thrive in Germany's Rhineland-Palatinate, or Rheinland-Pfalz, region each fall.

In German, chestnuts are called *Kastanien*, but in the Pfalz, you'll also hear *Keschde*, *Käschde* and *Käschte*. Chestnuts have a slightly sweet and starchy flavor. Roasted chestnuts are the most common, and my least favorite, preparation. However, I was soon converted — and you will be too — when I tried them pureed in soups and desserts, mashed and caramelized as a side dish, and stuffed in fowl.

Keschdeweg or Chestnut Path

The area along the Deutsche Weinstrasse from Hauenstein to Annweiler and on to Neustadt is known as the Keschdeweg. Cities host festivals and restaurants serve special menus to present the diverse uses and unique flavor of chestnuts in cuisine. Download a wandering map at www.keschdeweg.de, and head to these fests when hunger strikes:

Keschdefeschd, Annweiler am Trifels:

From Oct. 4-5, Annweiler hosts a festival with more than 40 stalls selling the delicacy. Purchase raw chestnuts by weight, chestnut blossom honey and chestnut-infused alcoholic drinks. Sample creations with a just a hint of chestnut to pure chestnut flavor, such as fillings, sauces, confections and ice cream. Witness the annual crowning of the chestnut princess on Oct. 4, and catch musical performances both days.

Discover even more chestnut cuisine during a culinary tour (*Kulinarische Kastanienführung*) Oct. 3 or 10. For times and reservations, go to www.trifelsland.de/de/genuss/kastanien. See recipes and a list of restaurants serving chestnut-themed fare at www.trifelsland.de/de/service-kontakt/keschdekochbuch.

Keschdewoche, Hauenstein:

Hauenstein devotes a week to chestnuts from Oct. 13 to 19. Bakers find new ways to use chestnuts in pastries and cakes, butchers add them to bratwurst, and eateries concoct multi-course chestnut menus.

On Sunday, Oct. 19 the city hosts a market, so head into town to socialize, eat fest food filled with chestnuts, and peruse stands for locally produced honey, jam, wine, cheese and more. At last year's fest, I had wonderful chestnut donuts and chestnut crême brûlée, so keep a lookout for these tasty desserts.

Learn more about Hauenstein's festivities via www.pfalz.de/freizeit-und-erleben/kulinarisch/keschdewoche# or www.hauenstein-pfalz.de.

Wein- und Kastanienmarkt,

Edenkoben: The weekend of Oct. 11-12, Edenkoben celebrates the bounty from thousands of nearby chestnut trees and vineyards. Enjoy chestnut bread, pasta garnished with chestnuts, and dry, flavorful

white wines. Try the Pfalz specialty of *Saumagen*, a meat loaf of pork, veggies, seasoning and chestnuts encased in pig's stomach; it tastes far better than it sounds.

For market information, visit www.garten-eden-pfalz.de/veranstaltungskalender. Call +49(0) 6323-959-222 or email touristinfo@vg-edenkoben.de to schedule a guided culinary tour.

Keschdekerwe und Verkaufsoffener,

Otterberg: Located beyond the Deutsche Weinstrasse and closer to home, Otterberg hosts a chestnut festival on Oct. 26. Choose from many chestnut dishes and get ahead on holiday shopping during Open Sunday (*Verkaufsoffener*). For details, go to www.otterberg.de.

Gathering & Cooking Chestnuts

While scoping out your favorite hiking trails for chestnuts, ensure that you avoid the toxic horse chestnut or buckeye. Watch the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGtWnekel94 and ask your German neighbor if you're unsure. Also learn proper peeling, scoring and roasting techniques at www.chestnutonline.com/peel.htm to avoid a chestnut explosion in your oven. Or buy prepared chestnuts from a German grocery store to skip these steps.

We'll be at the fests and hope you join us. Bis bald! ■

Tell us about Germany's best fests, restaurants and more!

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