



Roasting Sweet Chestnuts in Embers

Autumn is such a great time to connect with the trees and to take the opportunity to gather the abundance nature has to offer. Here we gather Sweet Chestnuts to roast in the embers on an open fire as well as suggest a couple of other ways to enjoy these woodland treats!

Primer

Sweet Chestnut trees have not always grown in Britain and are thought to have been introduced by the Romans due to the nutritional value of the nuts as well as the useful qualities of their wood.

- Sweet Chestnuts are typically in season from October - December in England.
- Sweet Chestnuts are packed full of goodness, containing carbohydrates, unsaturated fats and fibre as well as minerals and vitamins: calcium, iron, zinc, vitamin E and all the B vitamins needed to release energy from food.
- With high content of tannic acid, Sweet Chestnut heartwood is one of the most durable to the elements, even underground, making it the choice wood for fence posts.
- The wood was also used for barrels and caskets of wine!

Ages

All ages can enjoy this activity.

Duration

Variable depending on how abundantly Sweet Chestnuts grow for gathering and how many you are aiming to roast in embers. Once an established fire is lit, they only take 10 mins or so to roast well on a bed of embers.

How To

- Show the group the Sweet Chestnuts and how to gather them safely. Those where the green spiky husks are already open are often more ripe and ready, however it's great to show safely opening the husks with your shoes to get the nuts from the inside.
- Gather Sweet Chestnuts with your group.
- Sort through the Chestnuts, as you'll likely want to discard some as there may be some that are just cases (no nut inside) and others may have an insect hole with someone living inside.
- Prepare the good Chestnuts by slitting the skin. Some people say to do a 'cross' in the skin, however whilst the cross is aesthetically pleasing, a single slit also works just as effectively.

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Equipment Needed

- Ember bed from a fire (fire lighting equipment)
- Knife or skewer for piercing a steam hole in the sweet chestnuts
- Chopping board (optional)
- Sweet Chestnuts - best from a wild source if on site, but can also be brought in and roasted with a bit of storytelling about the Sweet Chestnut trees to help connect to them if they aren't present in your environment.

Variations

- Roast in a pan over a fire
- Process the Sweet Chestnuts and use to make other tasty treats (energy balls, cakes, porridge)

Teacher Tricks and Tips

- If you're limited by time, it is best to light your fire before going to gather the Sweet Chestnuts to allow a good ember bed to establish.

Invisible Learning

- Connection to food and foraging
- Connection to the trees
- Feeling at home and supported by nature

Hazards to Highlight

- Exploding sweet chestnuts as they heat in the fire - slit the skins to prevent this
- Cuts from slicing the steam holes in the Sweet Chestnut skins
- Misidentification - be aware of any lookalikes and point out to children. In the video we show the differences between Sweet Chestnut and Horse Chestnut as this is the only other brown nut growing in a somewhat spiky green case in England.

Risk Assessment Considerations

These are the risk assessment consideration documents to be referred to for this activity.

- Plant based activities (foraging)
- Fire based activities (cooking)
- Knife Safety
- Site risk assessment (specific to your site)

Links

- Hazelnut oven
- Ogham sticks

Tags

- Foraging, gathering, harvest, autumn, cooking, nuts, wild food, sweet chestnuts, nutty necklaces

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