

Chestnut Celebrations!

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Spanish Tit-Bits



It is one of the most recognisable and aromatic traditions in Spain, and a sure sign that autumn has started.

Stalls selling roast chestnuts, wrapped in cones made out of old newspapers, begin to appear on most Spanish streets at the end of October. The delicious delicacy is such a deep-rooted tradition that it even has its own national holiday, the “Día del Toston”, held on November 1, the same date as All Saints Day.

Andalucía is one of the most important areas in Spain for growing chestnuts. The Genal Valley, in the heart of the Serranía de Ronda, produces over 70% of Andalusian chestnuts. It is an important part of the economies of the villages of Pujerra, Alcaucín and Genalguacil, which are surrounded by dense chestnut and pine forests. With the arrival of autumn, the inhabitants of these charming ‘pueblos blancos’ focus all their efforts on the traditional chestnut collection.

The chestnut tree (*Castanea sativa*) itself can live for several centuries, making it one of the longest-lived trees in the world. According to experts who have visited the Serranía de Ronda, it has some of the healthiest chestnut groves in Europe. The chestnut fruit that comes from this region only undergoes basic processing, such as sterilisation of the chestnut fruit and the elimination of fruits with eggs or moth larvae and, of course, the packaging of the fresh chestnut.

The chestnuts from this region also benefit from the old custom of allowing sheep and pigs to graze close to the trees. As well as providing a natural fertiliser, they prevent pest outbreaks by eating the pupae in the ground before they can

grow and infect the trees!

Pujerra, located deep in the Genal Valley, is Andalucía's chestnut capital. The village's economy revolves around the chestnut harvest, with its own processing plant and even a festival dedicated to the chestnut. Held in in early November, it features traditional dishes such as tostones and even a powerful local liquor called mistela, made from coffee, brandy, cinnamon and sugar. Be careful with that, however, as the drive down the Ronda road is challenging enough!

One of the cornerstones of the region's rich gastronomic and cultural heritage, many towns in Andalusia hold special chestnut celebrations on November 1. This year both Marbella and San Pedro Alcantara are holding events open to the public that feature live music, entertainment for the little ones and, of course, lots of roasted chestnuts to be enjoyed.

With November 1 also marking the start of the harvest, there are strong links between Dia de Todos los Santos and feasting. Families often head into the countryside after visiting their departed relatives in the cemeteries.

For the ultimate Halloween/Toston celebration, however, you need to head a little further up the Coast. In Maro they hold Maroween' a gastronomic feast packed with chestnut and sweet potato treats, as well as witches and ghoulish costumes.

Whatever way you celebrate, don't miss out on this traditional and tasty event!!!