

## **South Tyrol Chestnut Traditions**



Fig. 1. In South Tyrol, chestnuts are celebrated during Törggelen (Sudtirol, n.d.).

## **6060 Turning Traditions into Markets Green Mountain College**

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## **Introduction**

Chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) are an essential part of South Tyrol's foodways (Sudtirol, n.d.). They offer numerous benefits to the region, providing a nutritious food stuff, a source of wood for agriculture and carpentry, and sheer beauty as both locals and tourists revel in the chestnut groves that line gorgeous hiking trails. While cultivation of chestnuts in the region has been on the decline, there is opportunity to reinvigorate the production in South Tyrol (Sudtirol, n.d.).

## **Chestnut Traditions**

One of the finest examples of chestnut traditions in South Tyrol is the much loved custom of Törggelen (Fig. 1), which is traced back to the traditional meeting of farmers and merchants in the autumn to taste the young wines (Sudtirol, n.d.). This became a custom that holds to this day, as both locals and tourists celebrate Törggelen from October to December by hiking through chestnut groves on their way to vineyards, followed by returning to the comfort of a farmhouse inn to eat traditional foods with new wine and roasted chestnuts (Sudtirol, n.d.).

Chestnut food traditions focus on mostly raw or roasted chestnuts with butter, however, chestnuts are also an ingredient in traditional dishes, including sweet chestnut rice, chestnut bread, and sweet chestnut hearts—a mixture of chocolate, cream, and chestnut puree (Sudtirol, n.d.).

Chestnuts are also celebrated via chestnut-lined hiking trails called “chestnut trail walks” (Fig. 2), and festivities focused on harvesting this culinary delight. The village of Verlturno devotes a week of activities to the chestnut, featuring recipes in restaurants and a festival celebrating the nut (Sudtirol, n.d.). The prickly covering of the chestnut is called a keschnigl (chestnut hedgehog), lending its name to various features in the South Tyrol.



Figure 2. Keschnigl (chestnut hedgehog) trail walks in South Tyrol (Sudtiro, n.d.).

### **Chestnut Use**

Chestnuts have been important to the region for many reasons. As a food source, chestnuts are durable, shelf-stable, and versatile, as well as nutritious, providing sustenance for the region during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sudtiro, n.d.). Chestnuts were often used to fortify bread-making (Sudtiro, n.d.), and they were used in roasted, boiled, or dried form; as an ingredient in porridges, candies, syrups and glaces; and as flour to use in cakes and biscuits (Pettenella, 2001). Chestnut wood has been used for functions like fences, vineyard stakes, fuel, baskets, handicrafts, furniture, and flooring (Fig. 3). Chestnut trees are also considered attractive in terms of aesthetics, further promoting the romanticism and tourism in the region (Fedrigotti, & Fischer, 2015).

### **Chestnut Nutrition**

Chestnuts are rich in nutrients, containing 196 calories, 2 grams (g) protein, 1 g fat, 44 g carbohydrates, 26 milligrams (mg) vitamin C (67% DV), .1 mg thiamin (10% DV), .4 mg vitamin B6 (18% DV), 58 micrograms (mcg) folate (14% DV), 484 mg potassium (14% DV), .4 mg copper (21% DV), and 30 mcg manganese (17% DV) per 100 gram portion of raw, peeled European chestnuts (USDA, 2018).

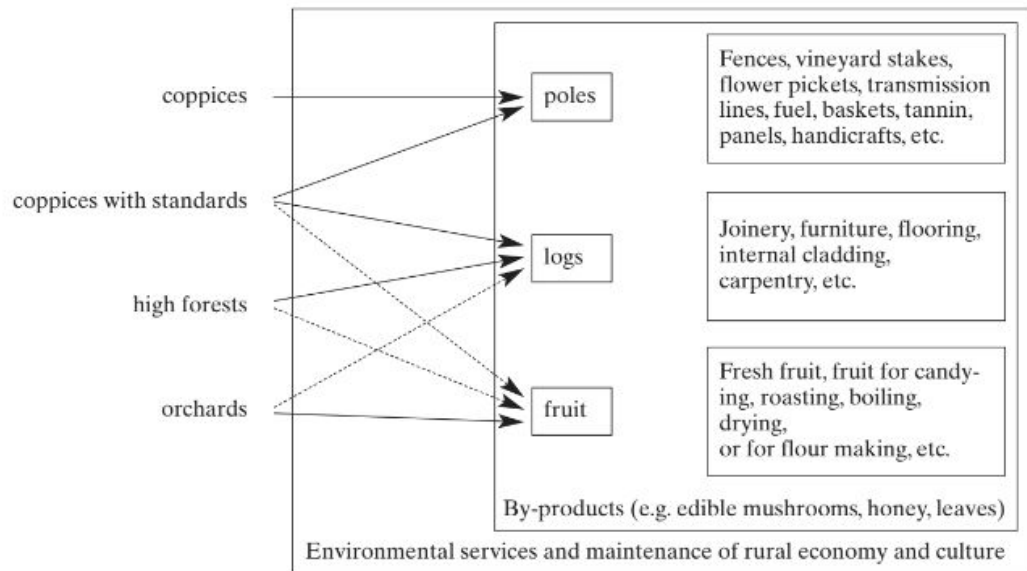


Figure 3. Management systems, products, and services characterizing chestnut markets. (Pettenella, 2001).

### Cultivating Chestnuts

There are about 300 chestnut cultivars in Italy—the leading producer of chestnuts in Europe (Fedrigotti, & Fischer, 2015). However, the crop is marginal in the South Tyrol region compared to other crops, such as apples and grapes (Fedrigotti, & Fischer, 2015). More than half of the chestnuts produced here are either consumed by the farm family or sold directly on the farm (Fedrigotti, & Fischer, 2015). Chestnut cultivation in the region has been on the decline, decreasing by half from 461 in 2000 to 262 in 2010 (Fedrigotti, & Fischer, 2015). Chestnuts have lost favor because of issues like consumption habits, competitive crops, chestnut blight, and climate change (Fedrigotti, & Fischer, 2015).



Figure 4. South Tyrol Chestnuts (Sudtirol, n.d.).

### **Opportunities for Chestnuts**

There is optimism that chestnuts (Fig. 4) might be ripe for a revival, as the demand for natural, local products is on the rise (Fedrigotti, & Fischer, 2015). Technological developments (forest management, biological control of chestnut blight, and harvesting technology) have increased performance of chestnut production (Pettenella, 2001). Chestnuts can add further value through processing and addition to products like cakes, biscuits, and candies (Pettenella, 2001). While there are a few setbacks, such as heterogeneous size and quality of crops, production variability, fungal infections, quality issues related to fresh products, and harvesting costs, the future seems bright (Pettenella, 2001).

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