

Appetising Autumn

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Spanish Tit-Bits



Falling leaves, shorter days and cooler temperatures, may herald autumn's arrival, but there is still plenty to celebrate. The change in the seasons sees a rich variety of fresh seasonal produce appearing in local markets and restaurants, especially in the south of Spain. As the main ingredients of some delicious recipes, products such as the humble chestnut are celebrated in some wonderfully unique festivals in many of the villages in Malaga province.

Spoiler alert. Autumn in Andalucía is not a great time to be a pig. Those of a vegetarian or vegan persuasion might like to skip to another section of Folio...

Think of autumn in Malaga and you will probably think of chestnuts. This is the time of year when chestnut sellers, or *castañeras*, roast chestnuts over coals. It really is 'Street Food', and for a few euros, the *castañera* will give you a newspaper cone filled with hot chestnuts.

Chestnut trees also create one of the most picturesque autumn images, as the leaves turn a shade of ochre before they fall. The Genal Valley, in the region of Ronda, is one of the largest producers of chestnuts in Spain, with about 3,500 hectares. The village of Pujerra, located in the valley, takes its chestnuts seriously. Not only is it home to the largest chestnut cooperative in Malaga province, but it also has a chestnut museum, as well as a festival that is held between October 31 and November 1.

November 1 is the Día de Toston, a national holiday throughout Spain. Families traditionally head into the countryside to enjoy eating and drinking in the open air, with chestnuts an essential part of the celebrations. In addition to this, several villages also hold festivals during autumn including the Tostón Popular in Ojén. One of the prettiest white villages and easily reached from the coast, Ojén celebrates the tradition of roasting chestnuts, with free samples as well as outdoor music and activities.

Further inland, the Wine and Chestnut Fair in Yunquera is a celebration of two of the region's most iconic products. During this fair, visitors can enjoy roasted, syrup-soaked, boiled, or freshly picked chestnuts, along with sweet wines, musts, rosés, or whites. The festival is lively with the music of verdiales groups and over twenty stalls in the square offering local products including cured meats, olive oil, and traditional pottery. There is also a cooking contest, grape crushing, and tasting of malcocinao, a typical Yunquera dish made with chickpeas, bacon, tripe, chorizo, and blood sausage. Yunquera is a little off the beaten track but well worth it!

Other seasonal produce includes mandarins and oranges that are used in several traditional recipes, most notably the ensalada malagueña (Malaga salad), made with cod, potatoes, oranges, olives and spring onions, and always dressed with a generous helping of extra virgin olive oil.

Then there is the purple carrot of Antequera. Yes, you did read that correctly. Originally grown as fodder for livestock, the "zanahoria morá" has become a delicacy in jams, a cream of carrot soup, roasted or raw in salads. Of course, the purple carrot has its own festival in the first week of December in Cuevas Bajas.

Finally, we come to the pig. Fattened up throughout the summer, autumn is traditionally the time when the animals are slaughtered, providing vital food through the winter months. As the pig was so valuable, Spanish cuisine has created either a dish or a way of preserving the pork so that nothing was wasted. As the Spanish saying goes, the only part of the pig that is not used - is the squeal!