



**CHESTNUT**  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The American Chestnut is back! The forests of eastern North America were once dominated by the American Chestnut. Massive trees often reached 120 feet tall on trunks to 13 feet across. The wood was esteemed as a premier cabinet and furniture making material, as versatile as oak, but easier to work and more beautiful. Beginning around 1900, blight struck the American Chestnut, and by 1950, only a few small, isolated stands remained.

Researchers collected genetic material from those surviving trees and began to cross them with the blight-resistant Chinese Chestnut. Several varieties were developed and tested in groves that had been inoculated with the deadly blight. We are happy to report that no blight has been found in the original test orchards. We hope you will join us in bringing back the great American Chestnut!

These new American crosses have larger nuts than the Chinese Chestnut, with a sweet crunchy, chinquapin flavor. They are delicious fresh, steamed or roasted, or they can be dried and ground into a sweet flour for making cakes and breads.

## **USES IN THE LANDSCAPE**

Create your own edible forest with the large, coarsely textured leaves and broad, umbrella-shaped canopy of chestnut, mixed with the willowy beauty of pecan and the broad, heart-shaped leaves of mulberry.

## **PLANTING AND CULTURE**

### **SITE SELECTION**

Well-drained, deep soils are preferred, but chestnuts will grow on many soil types. Trees will grow more vigorously and produce more nuts in full sun. Two are required for pollination, either 2

seedlings or different varieties for named cultivars. Plant 30 to 50 feet apart for best results—these will be full-sized shade trees.

## **SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING**

Chestnuts prefer acid soil (pH 4.5-5.5). If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, take a sample to the Cooperative Extension Agent in your county for a soil test.

Dig a planting hole at least twice as big as the pot and twice as deep. Enrich the planting hole with acid mulches like peat moss or pine bark mixed with soil dug from the hole (50:50 mix). Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. The trees should be planted **at or slightly above** the same level at which it grew in its pot. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Do NOT put fertilizer in the planting hole. Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below).

If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of mulch.

## **FERTILIZATION**

We use and recommend the Espoma line of organic fertilizers. Espoma's Holly Tone is a good choice for chestnut trees. When not available look for an organic mix that contains an analyst of roughly 4-3-4. Make sure they contain iron, zinc, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, copper and boron. These minor elements are very important to plants and most soils are low in these elements. Application rates vary according to type and age of plant, so read the instructions on the bag and fertilize accordingly. Be sure to spread the fertilizer evenly under the entire canopy of the plant avoiding a 2-inch area around the trunk. Water or rake in. For Zones 8a-10, fertilize 3 times each year in February, May and late July/early August. For plants further north (Zones 6-7), fertilize 2 times each year in March and June/July. Never fertilize after August (July in Zones 6-7) as this will promote new growth when the plant needs to go dormant.

## **WATER**

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new tree. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply. Chestnut should receive at least 1 inch of water each week for best growth and fruit production, but established trees are drought resistant.

## **PRUNING AND CARE**

Chestnuts have few pests and diseases. Occasional pruning is necessary to open the center of the tree for greater light and air penetration. Remove crossing, dead or damaged branches as needed.

## **FRUITING AND HARVEST**

Typically it can take 4-5 years before a chestnut tree will produce nuts and you must have 2 trees for pollination. Nuts should be allowed to thoroughly ripen on the tree for best quality and flavor. Wait until they fall from the tree to gather them. Remember your gloves because the outer husk is spiny.