

American Chestnut Cooperators Foundation

2661 Forest Service Road 708, Newport, VA 24128

<https://accf-online.org> or <https://accf-chestnut.org>

For the best first-year growth, your chestnut seed should be planted when the squirrels plant. Remembering that American chestnuts can double their growth annually, don't settle for 2 x 6", but go for 2 x 12" planting tubes. Thus, your planting place(s) must be prepared well before harvest time. And never use fertilizer because it encourages growth of feeder roots, which slow down taproot development and is also capable of killing young chestnuts in accidental spills.

Nursery preparation: Keep in mind that the seedlings growing in a nursery will be transplanted to their permanent sites next fall and transplant success is most likely if they are no more than one foot tall. Thus, choose a place in partial shade. If the soil is sandy-loam, turn it over to a depth of one foot, removing roots, rocks, rodent tunnels and cutworms to make a circular bed 3.5 feet in diameter. Make the wire protection cage 4 feet tall & 3 feet in diameter, centered around the prepared soil, with a stake holding it in place. Dig a trench 3 inches deep in the prepared soil outside the cage, spread MoleMax or Repels-All to cover the bottom of the trench to deter rodent tunneling, fill and pack the soil. If you must plant in clay or other poorly drained soil, remove 2/3 of the turned soil and replace it with a 50/50 mix of sand & peat moss, and mix well into the remaining soil.

Choosing permanent sites: The best places are exposed to the morning sun, on the upper half of steep slopes, with deep, well-drained acid soils for fastest tree growth. Before the blight fungus spread through our forests, American chestnuts also thrived on mountain slopes that face West; these now may be among the worst sites for planting if they receive direct afternoon sun. On warm winter days, sun heats the bark, followed by freezing nights that cause it to crack. Blight lodging in the cracks, during winter when chestnuts are dormant, can kill ACCF chestnuts less than 2.5 inches DBH. Blight kills by girdling trees. If your only choice has a western exposure, plant other trees first to screen your chestnuts from the afternoon sun.

Planting on permanent sites: You prepare planting places much the same as nursery beds, except holes must be dug at least 2 feet deep, and probed deeper, to be sure there are no large roots, rocks or ancient dumps below to obstruct taproot

growth. Otherwise, make your planting places as described in 'Nursery preparation' above. Push chestnut seed into the prepared soil, one inch deep in the South, deeper in the North (frost heaves) and pack the soil down hard to give the appearance that nothing has been planted (fool raccoons).

Protection: Deer and many other woodland animals prefer American chestnuts. They nibble the new growth through summer, and eat chestnut twigs in winter. We advise 5ft tall, 2" x 4" weld wire cages, to protect the chestnut leader. Cages may be 2 to 3ft in diameter. Choose narrower cages for difficult to reach sites, letting the deer prune lower branches, while the leader remains protected. Wider cages are more stable, thus make it easier to weed and probe for rodent and insect trouble. Cages are virtually invisible to a running deer, so decorate them with bright plastic flagging. This is another good reason for preparing your planting holes & protection well in advance, so the local deer population may become accustomed to their presence and less likely to crash into them when hunting season begins. Tall tree shelters should not be substituted for cages because they put the young chestnuts in too much shade and they have insufficient space for the large leaves to spread, causing spindly rather than straight growth. Tree shelters are also capable of killing young chestnuts because they can become incubators for the blight fungus.

You may find more useful information on our websites (above). In Newsletters, scroll down to find the past newsletters archived below the most recent. All our best wishes for success with your all-American chestnut planting.

Cheerio, *Lucille*