

JUST FRUITS

AND EXOTICS

CHESTNUT

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 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 + 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 from 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 approximately three times the width of the pot and at the same depth as the root ball. Set that soil aside and mix it 50/50 with either peat moss or rotted pine bark. Do NOT use manure or mushroom compost. Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. To avoid burying too deep, make sure plant is positioned with the top most roots at the soil line. 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. Pine bark, leaves or pine straw are all good mulches for Chestnuts. Pull mulch a couple of inches away from the trunk for good air circulation.

FERTILIZATION

The type of fertilizer you choose may be chemical or organic. Make sure that the fertilizer contains 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 age of plant. See chart below:

Starter Fertilizer & Soil (Apply at Planting)	Fertilizer to Maintain (Apply Early March, Late May, & Late July)
Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus Mix Peat Moss in Soil	Espoma Holly-tone®

Notes:

- Follow Instructions on Bag for how much to apply each time.
- Months to Fertilize vary based on your zone. Fertilize 3 times per year. We recommend the 1st fertilization starting after the last Freeze of the winter (Late February/Early March in zone 8) & the last Fertilization being no later than August or even June/July in some of the colder zones 7 & below.)
- Fertilizing too late in the year in colder climates will promote new growth, which will be subject to freeze damage.

See our “Planting a Tree Correctly” Guide & Espoma Bio-tone® and Tree-tone® Fact Sheets on our website for more info.

WATER

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new chestnut. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply – this usually takes 45-60 minutes. Chestnuts should receive at least 1 inch of water each week for best growth and fruit production. Water regularly, especially during dry periods. Fruit may drop prematurely if insufficiently irrigated during dry spells.

PRUNING + 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 + HARVEST

Typically it can take 4-5 years before a chestnut tree will produce nuts. 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!