

# Autumn

## A GREAT TIME OF YEAR TO SEARCH FOR AMERICAN CHESTNUT

By Tom Saielli, Mid-Atlantic and Southern Regional Science Coordinator

Looking for a fun and safe way to spend your free time this fall? Grab your mobile device and download the TreeSnap app. Head for the hills to hunt for wild American chestnuts to support The American Chestnut Foundation's (TACF) breeding program (with proper social distancing, of course). Autumn is a great time to search for these trees - the oppressive summer heat is beginning to wane, fall foliage appears on the horizon, and burs begin to open and drop their seed for harvesting (if you get there before the squirrels)!

### Why should you help locate American chestnut?

Our 3BUR breeding program (Breeding, Biocontrol and Biotechnology United for Restoration)



John Scrivani, VA-TACF Chapter, displays the fruits of his labor; a nut filled bur he found while hiking in western Virginia. John made sure to bring a pole pruner, a bag for the burs he collected, and TreeSnap to record information, including location and GPS coordinates. Photo by Tom Saielli.

requires a large populous of American chestnut to ensure a robust, genetically diverse population of potentially blight-tolerant trees. We also need to conserve American

chestnut germplasm in conservation orchards. Finally, 'chestnut hikes' are a fun and healthy activity for citizen scientists of all ages and abilities.

### Why is autumn a great time to search for American chestnut?

After receiving the appropriate permission from landowners, Autumn is the time to collect viable chestnut seeds. Depending on your location, seeds could be collected from late September to early October. Timing is important because when the burs fall and open, the nuts are a delectable treat for wildlife. Finally, be sure to flag trees for later collection of twigs, or scion, for further research use.

## TIPS FOR FINDING WILD AMERICAN CHESTNUT

### 1 Head for the hills

American chestnut is an upland species, so searching hilly country will improve your odds. The most abundant sites will be in the Appalachian Mountains (the core range of American chestnut), but you can find them at low elevations too, as long as the terrain is hilly. Heading upslope is the trick. Avoid searching river bottoms and cool coves.

### 2 Familiarize yourself with chestnut habitat

#### OAK-HICKORY FOREST

- Soils are moist, but well-drained (not mesic)
- Typically hilly or mountainous
- Upland species

#### Community type:

- Chestnut oak (the most common co-occurring species)
- Other oaks, including red oaks & white oaks
- Hickory
- White pine
- Mountain laurel
- Sassafras
- Sourwood
- Blueberry

American chestnut predominantly inhabits oak-hickory forests, typically with an abundance of chestnut oak. Look for other common species associated with chestnut, including sassafras, white pine, sourwood, mountain laurel, and blueberry. You are less likely to find chestnut in mesic sites, dominated by maples, birch, ash and carpets of ferns. Red maple, poplars, and beech are overlapping

species and can be found growing in a variety of habitats, alongside chestnut as well, but also in cool wet sites, so they are not good indicators of chestnut habitat.

### 3 Start with what you know

Look at the American chestnut range map. Where in the chestnut range are you likely to hike or take country drives? Finding hilly, forested areas with trails or backcountry roads is easiest when you are familiar with the region, so start with what you know.

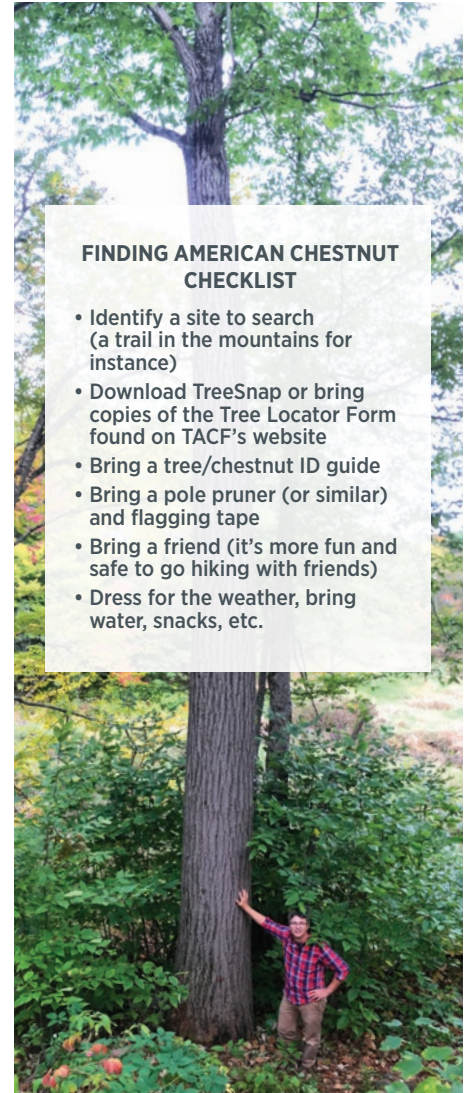


### 4 Additional pro tip

If you know of any sites that have been released in the last decade or so, you may find flowering trees and be able to harvest seeds. "Released" means there has been an opening in the canopy. This could result from a fire, windstorm or cutover, or perhaps along roads or power lines.

### 5 Be prepared

Remember to download the TreeSnap app and bring all necessary supplies.



#### FINDING AMERICAN CHESTNUT CHECKLIST

- Identify a site to search (a trail in the mountains for instance)
- Download TreeSnap or bring copies of the Tree Locator Form found on TACF's website
- Bring a tree/chestnut ID guide
- Bring a pole pruner (or similar) and flagging tape
- Bring a friend (it's more fun and safe to go hiking with friends)
- Dress for the weather, bring water, snacks, etc.

### 6 Be safe

Chestnut hikes are COVID-safe, healthy, and fun. However, during the pandemic, it is important to avoid carpooling with non-family members. Go with friends but maintain social distancing and/or wear masks. Remember, your safety and the safety of others is most important.



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# Give the Gift of Membership



When you give a gift membership to support The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF), you share a story of history and hope. You bolster the promise of future forests thriving with American chestnut once more.

With your one-time gift, your recipient can enjoy a year of engaging news from TACF's award-winning *Chestnut* magazine, member access to the annual wild American seedling sale, and affiliation with their local chapter to get involved at the grass roots level. You may add a personalized message that will be sent along with your heartfelt gift - a gift that not only helps restore the iconic American chestnut tree to its native range, but will benefit our ecosystem and future generations.

Your generosity provides  
invaluable support to TACF.  
Thank you!

## What to do if you find wild American chestnuts

Document your find in TreeSnap and check for viable seed, which have a plump and smooth appearance. Record location and other relevant



TreeSnap

### DOWNLOAD THE TREESNAP APP

- Whenever you find a wild chestnut, use your app to record it
- Open the app and click on "American Chestnut"
- Take lots of pictures - especially of the leaves
- Record data and upload your entry
- It will work even in areas with no service

information, such as the presence of stump spouts. Store the seeds in a cool, dry place. Contact your state chapter representative or TACF regional science coordinator about your find.

If the trees are not producing seed, we still want to know about your discovery. Flag the tree(s) and record the location. We may later ask you to go back and collect dormant twigs for grafting, or we may try collecting rooted stump sprouts so we can preserve their DNA.

**Questions?** Contact your local TACF state chapter or regional science coordinator. Contact information can be found on our website at [acf.org](http://acf.org).

**Happy Hunting!**