



The West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation NEWSLETTER



In the heart of American chestnut's natural range

January 2025

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Washington Bottom Farm

Bernie and Linda Coyle distributed an assortment of chestnut seedlings to Mike and Carol Shaw, who own Washington Bottom Farm near Springfield. Washington Bottom Farm, also known as the George W. Washington House and Farm, is a 19th-century Greek Revival plantation house and farm. It is located on a plateau overlooking the South Branch Potomac River north of Romney. The populated area adjacent to Washington Bottom Farm is known as Ridgedale. The farm is connected to West Virginia Route 28 via Washington Bottom Road (West Virginia Secondary Route 28/3).

Ridgedale, constructed in 1835, was the residence of gentleman farmer George William Washington, a descendant of George Washington's great-great-grandfather, Reverend Lawrence Washington. The farm is currently a private residence of the Shaw family.



Mike and Carol Shaw with their chestnut seedlings from the Coyles.

Chapter's Meeting

There were two chapter's meetings since the last WV chapter newsletter. The 25 October zoom meeting of chapter presidents and representatives featured **Kendra Collins**, the New England Regional Science Coordinator. She talked about TACF chapter's support of recurrent genomic selection (RGS), also known as the Best X Best program. TACF is continuing with its

breeding program because great strides in both blight and *Phytophthora* resistance. Also, there are no regulations associated with breeding, compared to genetic engineering that has a multitude of regulations. Kendra stated that there are a number of really good trees (American form and sufficient resistance to the chestnut blight fungus), but no one state chapter has enough of these trees. Thus, state chapters have to work together with a pipeline of good material. She sees the following steps necessary to produce good chestnut material:

- Select parents that meet the standards for blight and *Phytophthora* resistance and American ancestry.
- Prioritize controlled pollinations
- Grow seedlings in greenhouses.
- Select progeny based on ancestry
- Plant the top 10% of selected progeny in seed orchards.

Planting site needs (% of seed in each project):

- Seed orchards (10%). Plant trees that pass the thresholds for blight and *Phytophthora* resistance and American ancestry.
- Small Stem Assays (10% - 20%)
- Field Trials (20%-40%) Evaluate blight resistance and growth with field inoculations of the chestnut blight fungus. Improve genomic models and phenotyping methods.
- *Phytophthora* trials (20%-40%)
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The workflow is as follows:

- Year 1--collect/freeze pollen from the best trees and prioritize controlled pollinations.
- Year 2--grow seedlings in greenhouses. This is currently being done at Meadowview Research Farm in Virginia and at the Linville River Nursery in NC.
- Year 3--plant seedlings
- Years 4-13-data collection

For test plantings, we can start now. Test plantings can be done to see if sites are suitable for growing chestnuts and to see if our partners can maintain the sites.

The following sites can be installed by chapters:

Seed orchards. These require good sites and good partners. Trees are planted on wide spacing. There are no fungal inoculations at these sites. Controlled pollinations are made for recurrent genomic selections.

Field Trials. These plantings will use the standard 7' X 15' spacing. Trees will be inoculated with virulent strains of the chestnut blight fungus and the resulting

cankers will be rated. These trials also require good sites and good partners.

Forest Trials. These plantings will be a mixture of genotypes. Best X Best management plans will be used for these long-term plantings of good recurrent genomic material.

Common Garden Trials. These plantings are duplicated at various sites among the 16 state chapters. These trials will use 'extra' RGS seeds.

What can we do in 2025?

- We can start test plantings in the progeny sites with 20-30 direct-seeded nuts.
- We can find sites (>2 acres) for common garden studies.
- Continue planting germplasm conservation orchards (GCOs).
- Conduct controlled pollinations.

Chapters should continue to collect nuts from wild-type trees. These nuts can be used for our GCOs and members. Chapters with extra nuts can contribute those to Meadowview for distribution.

As stated in the last chapter newsletter, TACF is making it easy for those who want trees. To find the link, go to: TACF.org and use the 'engage' button in the menu at the top. Then click on 'How to Get Trees'. If you are a member, you will be asked the following questions: Name, Email address, state of residence; the type of planting (see below), and the type of trees you want (hybrids or Americans)

TACF Planting Types:

Member Plantings

- Member Planting
- Seed Level Member Planting
- Site Test

Outreach Plantings

- Ceremonial
- Demonstration

Science Plantings

- Orchards
- American Germplasm Conservation Orchard (GCO)
- Breeding Orchard
- Seed Orchard
- Progeny Test
- Transgenic Planting
- Research and Silviculture
- Research (general)

- Reintroduction Trial
- Restoration Trial
- Restoration Planting

The December chapter's meeting was held on 5 December. The new chapter's committee chair is Berry College professor, **Dr. Marty Cipollini** from the Georgia chapter.

TACF President and CEO, **Dr. Will Pitt** talked about the new chapter agreements. The new agreements were sent out to chapter presidents and TACF would like the agreements to be voted on by chapter boards and submitted by May 22. The agreements have been a work in progress for more than 4 years. They were approved by the chapters committee in September and voted on by the full TACF board in October. The agreements are no longer able to be revised. They simply need chapter approval.

Will suggested that each chapter revisit their by-laws. Some state chapters have not revised their bylaws in 25 years. Some suggestions for changes may be to add virtual meetings as a result of Covid.

The new TACF logos for each state chapter are now final. The plan is to unveil them all at the same time so we do not have old and new logos being used simultaneously. There was no date set as to when the unveiling will occur.

New volunteer software will be unveiled in 2025. Each chapter will get one login and one password. It will be up to the chapter presidents to decide with whom that information will be shared. Chapter events can be added and TACF staff will train as many people as needed. Currently, if a TACF member goes to the home page (tacf.org) and clicks on 'Engage' and then 'Volunteer', there are three buttons (start volunteering, sign waiver and record hours). These three buttons will become just one button when the volunteer pages is finalized, making it easier to volunteer. Some of the training for this software will be in conjunction with the monthly chapter's committee meetings. Once a few members in each chapter are trained, they can then assist with training members of their respective chapter. The hope is that the new volunteer software will be up and running in time for the upcoming field season.

Chapter administrators will be able to add events and then see who has volunteered for specific events.

One final piece of news was shared. **Kendra Collins**, the New England Regional Science Coordinator (RSC) is step-

ping down from TACF after 17 years. Not only was Kendra the RSC for New England, but she was the Director of Regional Programs for TACF. Some in the WV chapter have known Kendra since she was in graduate school 20 years ago. Kendra has been a great colleague and she will be sorely missed.

Land and Mineral Owner's Meeting

Mark Double was invited to speak to the WV Land and Mineral Owner's annual meeting at the Edgewood County Club in Charleston on 6 November 2024. The group of about 40 attendees heard from representatives from Hope Gas, Living Carbon and the Nature Conservancy in addition to Mark's talk on chestnut. The group included strip mine operators, so Mark included in his presentation information about the success of chestnuts that were planted on reclaimed strip mine sites.



A portion the audience at Land and Mineral Owner's meeting in Charleston.

Fort New Salem Christmas Festival

Sam Muncy, WV chapter treasurer, worked at the Fort New Salem's *Spirit of Christmas in the Mountains* over two weekends, Nov 30/Dec 1 and Dec 7/8 roasting chestnuts over an open fire. Sam passed out hot roasted chestnuts to all festival-goers at no charge. Sam wants people to learn about chestnuts and experience the taste of what was common a hundred years ago. Sam braved the frigid conditions; his only heat was the fire upon which he roasted chestnuts in a cast iron pot.

WV chapter board of director, **Carla Kesling**, also volunteered at the festival. She worked in the apothecary shop allowing folks to grind up lemon balm, lavender and other notables to make sachets. All the festival volunteers wore period costumes as they worked in log cabins that were disassembled and moved to fort at Salem.



Sam Muncy (center) and friends at the chestnut roasting tent at Fort New Salem.



Carla Kesling demonstrating sachet making in the apothecary cabin at Fort New Salem.

For those who missed the festival this year, put it on your list for next Christmas. There were some wonderful, engaging artisans working in a variety of areas. In addition to roasted chestnuts and the apothecary, there were candle makers, blacksmith, tin shop, toy makers, print shop, corn grinder, and a donut/mulled wine shop. A beehive oven is proposed for next year in which bread will be baked.

A Story from the Past

A 1940 article from the *Pocahontas Times*, written by **Carl Burgdorf**, forest ranger, gives us a glimpses into the importance of American chestnut. Carl writes:

There are times when we miss an acquaintance dreadfully after he is gone. So it is with the American chestnut which was so important in our local life and economy. The chestnut tree occupied a place which was unique among our hardwoods. Few, if any tree could compete with the chestnut in vigor of sprouting, rapidity of growth, and yield of a great variety of useful products such as high-grade lumber, poles, ties, posts rails, slack cooperage, paper and fiber boards, tannin extracts from bark and wood and the abundance of



Sam Muncy offering a hot, roasted chestnut to a visitor.

nuts which served as food for both animals and man.

Records indicate the total value of chestnut products produced in 1908, not including nuts, amount to over 19 million dollars, and in 1910, chestnut comprised seven percent of the total amount of hardwood lumber cut. Now, the remaining chestnut snags stand bare of bark or small twigs serving their most useful purpose as den trees for forest wildlife.

Note: Carl worked in the Monongahela National Forest Potomac District from 1944-1948. He then worked for the Cumberland National Forest (now Daniel Boone National Forest), and the U.S. Forest Service. Carl published several articles in the late 1950s to late 1960s.

European Chestnut Vendors

During a recent trip through Europe, **Mark Double** saw a number of roasted chestnut vendors and chestnut confections in store windows. European chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) are harvested in many areas of Europe and sold by vendors on the streets. Most vendors sell 'marroni' chestnuts. What is the difference between common European chestnuts (also referred to as sweet chestnuts) and marroni?

The common European chestnut is widespread in many chestnut-growing areas. More elongated in shape, dark brown in color, chestnuts have an inner skin (pellicle) that penetrates deep into the inside of the flesh, in some cases to the point of dividing it, often making them difficult to peel. From a commercial point of view, chestnuts differ in size. Marroni are much larger than regular chestnuts and demand a higher price.

'Marroni', destined both for industrial processing and fresh consumption, are the most sought after type on the market where they are sold at high prices. 'Marroni' fruits are more "rounded" in shape, with a light brown skin slightly streaked and a sweeter and more fragrant taste than other chestnuts. Among the main characteristics of 'marroni' is the fact that the pellicle does not penetrate the flesh allowing them to be peeled more easily.

Europeans have four uses for chestnuts:

- Fresh chestnuts: they are eaten after being cooked in the oven or barbecued;

- Soft dried chestnuts: perfect for an immediate consumption but perishable;
- Tough dried chestnuts: before consumption, they need to be rehydrated; and
- Chestnut flour: obtained from dried chestnuts and used in several sweet and savory recipes.

Following are some pictures of a few chestnut vendors selling hot, roasted chestnuts.



Chestnut vendor in Cologne, Germany.



Chestnut vendor in Strasbourg, France.



Another chestnut vendor in Strasbourg, France



Mark Double at a yet-to-be-opened chestnut stand at a Christmas market in Cologne, Germany



A chestnut vendor in Vienna, Austria using an old-fashioned method roasting chestnuts in a 55-gallon drum over hot coals.

Marron glacés are a confection found in many shops in Europe. This confection originated in Italy and it consists of chestnuts candied in sugar and syrup and glazed. The history of this confection dates back to a chef in the court of Duke of Savoy, Carlo Emanuele (1562-1630). Spelling of marroni varies not only from country to country but within towns. Below are beautifully wrapped marron glacés in a store in Strasbourg, France, selling for 3 Euro each.

