



The West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation **NEWSLETTER**



In the heart of American chestnut's natural range

May 2026

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Seedling Distribution 2026

In May 2026, about 1,300 chestnut seedlings were distributed across the state and beyond. Seedlings for WV chapter members in the eastern panhandle were given to WV chapter President, **Bernie Coyle** who placed them in the Potomac State greenhouse in Keyser. WV chapter members in southern WV were able to pick up their seedlings from **Dr. Lewis Cook** in Fayetteville who has his own greenhouse.



Chestnut seedlings at the West Virginia University greenhouse.



About 300 chestnut seedlings in the back of Bernie Coyle's car.

Those members who did not pick up their seedlings either in Keyser or Fayetteville, were able to get their seedlings in Morgantown at the West Virginia University greenhouse where the seedlings were grown from seed. In addition to WV chapter members, seedlings also were provided to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the Sutton Dam, the WV Division of Forestry, Cooper's Rock State Forest, at Ridgway farms (Humanimal Bond) outside Morgantown, and the Charles Town Tree Board.



A pickup truck load of chestnut seedlings was delivered to Dr. Lewis Cook in Fayetteville who tended to them for WV chapter members in southern WV. Thanks to Bernie Coyle and Dr. Cook for caring for the seedlings so that all members did not have to travel to Morgantown for their seedling pick-up.

One unique request for seedlings came from **Saint Sava Shadeland Camp** in Springboro, PA, near Cleveland, OH. This camp has been a gathering place for Serbian Orthodox families—a place where children deepen their faith, friendships are formed, and cultural traditions are passed from one generation to the next. Shadeland is more than land and buildings. It is a living center of faith, fellowship, and Serbian heritage dedicated to preserving and stewarding the Shadeland property for generations to come. Their focus is on:

- Lead volunteer work days
- Organize cultural and community events
- Protect and enhance the grounds
- Support the legacy of faith, fellowship, and Serbian heritage

The manager of the camp, **Pat O'Shea**, requested chestnut seedlings for their educational curriculum. Pat joined TACF, and the WV chapter provided Pat with 20 chestnut seedlings: 14 Americans; 4 Chinese; and

2 backcross. As with any demonstration orchard, future campers will see the differences in blight tolerance and tree form between American, Chinese and backcross trees.

Recurrent Genomic Selection Plantings

The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) uses Recurrent Genomic Selection (RGS) to breed blight-resistant American chestnut trees by using DNA profiles to predict disease resistance. By selecting the best parents based on genetic data and crossing them over multiple generations ("recurrent"), they efficiently increase resistance and aim to restore the species to the wild.

The WV chapter was fortunate enough to plant two 100-tree RGS plantings. Under the direction of the new Mid-Atlantic Regional Science Coordinator, **Kaitlyn Harless**, the Parsons planting was installed on May 4 and the Burnsville planting on May 7.

The Parsons planting went extremely well. With more than 15 people, 100 holes were dug and the trees were planted in less than 2 hours. **Brian Smith** and his father, Jim, had a gas-powered auger that sped along the digging. The remaining workers dug holes the old-fashioned way—with shovels.



Jeff Kochenderfer listens as Kaitlyn Harless provides planting instructions to the crew.

The trees were all tagged, and they were each planted in a specific hole so that they can be followed over the coming years. The trees represented different

crosses, so it is necessary to keep accurate records.



Jim and Brian Smith augured holes.



An enthusiastic Blaise Hollot completed a planting.



Dr. Melissa Thomas-VanGundy (foreground) planted a seedling.



Kaitlyn Harless explains proper planting of a chestnut seedling.



Brian Smith installs a tree shelter as the last step in the process.



A view of the field at the close of planting.



A photo of the planting crew at Parsons.

The Parsons site is an old nursery bed, so the soil was almost too good for chestnut--a dark, rich loam. Digging holes was like a hot knife in butter--not a stone was found. Never has digging holes been so easy. The nursery was abandoned after the 1985 flood, and it will make for an excellent site for chestnut. A 10'-deer fence surrounds the planting. Tree shelters were added to protect against moles and voles.

The Burnsville planting was installed on May 7 near the Bulltown Campground in Napier (Braxton County). **Brian Carson** with the Burnsville Lake U.S. Army Corps of Engineers augured all 100 holes with a tractor. In addition to Brian, members of the WV Department of Natural Resources assisted with the planting. Since this planting was not fenced like the one at Parsons, individual wire cages were built and attached to T-poles. Prior to adding



WV chapter vice president, Jerry Legg, placed some of the seedlings in the marked holes at the Bulltown RGS planting.

the cages, Brian provided newspaper and hardwood mulch that were added to maintain a moisture barrier during periods of drought this summer. The Bulltown site was chosen for several reasons: it was a convenient site adjacent to a road; there is high visibility for the public; and there is a water hydrant nearby.



Muddy knees were very evident on those who helped plant the seedlings.



Brian Carson with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built many of the wire cages necessary to protect the seedlings from deer.



Some of the Bulltown planting crew posed for a photo following completion of the planting.



TACF's Mid-Atlantic Regional Science Coordinator, Kaitlyn Harless, holds one of the metal T-posts that were affixed to the wire cage. In addition, a 4' metal rebar was pounded into place on the opposite side of the T-post to add extra security. When running at full speed, deer can do a great deal of damage to wire cages, so reinforcement was used to make the seedlings as secure as possible.



The finished Bulltown planting.

Many of these photos were posted on the WV-TACF Facebook page, and some responses commented that the trees are planted too closely together. These are test plantings, not long-term plantings. The seedlings planted both at Parsons and at Bulltown were from hand-pollinations so that both the parents are known. There may be two seedlings that have the same mother tree but pollen from different male trees. If one seedling dies and the other does not, then the failure may be due to the male parent. Thus, it is important to

know where each and every seedling is planted since the parents of each are known. In about 5 years, 2031, the trees will be inoculated with an agar plug of the chestnut fungus to determine the blight resistance/blight susceptibility of each tree. Some trees will undoubtedly die, while others will strive (hopefully). We can then use the trees that survive and have good form to cross with native WV American chestnut trees to develop trees that have sufficient resistance, form of American chestnut and adaptability to WV.

Commonly Asked Questions

Many new members ask what they can do to help the WV chapter. While we offered two plantings that members were able to assist with (Parsons and Bulltown), one important chapter need is the location of nut-producing American chestnuts in the wild. If the former WV state nursery's 200-tree American chestnut orchard in Mason County is lost to development (Nvidia's AI plant), we will need members to find and collect American chestnuts in the wild. Chestnuts from the former state nursery comprised more than 85% of the nuts that were collected in 2025.

Where to look

American chestnut trees are mostly found in wooded areas of the Appalachian mountains and foothills. The surviving sprouts are more likely to be found in acidic soils on dry, well-drained hillsides (facing south and east, where the sun is hotter and the soil drier). Also, look on sandy soils that have good drainage.

Plants associated with American chestnut include mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) and chestnut oak (*Quercus prinus*; formerly *Quercus montana*).

Flowering American chestnuts are most likely to be found in areas exposed to a lot of sun — along roadsides, at the edge of the forest, and in areas where a lot of the overstory trees have been removed (e.g. clear-cuts).

How to identify an American chestnut

Chestnut trees are most easily located while they are in full bloom, from early-to-late June in WV. The great mass of conspicuous white catkins on larger trees is visible at great distances. The odor of the blooms is also quite distinctive, especially on still mornings and evenings. Later in summer, bur-laden trees are fairly obvious. In early fall, chestnut leaves turn yellow sooner than the leaves

of many other deciduous trees with yellow leaves. In late fall, the brown leaves tend to stay on the trees. In fall and winter, to locate trees that had female flowers the previous summer look on the ground for fallen burs.

American: American chestnut leaves are long in comparison to their width, the teeth on the edges of the leaf curve inward, and the stems usually have a reddish color. There are no hairs on the twigs or hair on the leaf undersurface of American chestnut.

Chinese: Chinese chestnut leaves are more oval in shape, thicker and more leathery than American chestnut leaves. The upper-surface of leaves are often shiny with a whitish cast on the undersurface of the leaf (due to leaf hairs), and the stems are tan/gray with large white “bumps” or lenticels on them. The twigs, like the leaf undersurface, contain hairs.



American chestnut leaf (left), Chinese chestnut leaf (right) with an American x Chinese chestnut hybrid in the middle.



American chestnut (left) form differs greatly from that of Chinese chestnut (right). American chestnut grows straight and tall whereas Chinese chestnut has more of an apple tree form.



Cream-colored male flowers (catkins) on American chestnut.

Chestnut Box at General Patton Museum

In May, **Bernie and Linda Coyle** traveled to Fort Knox, KY to the General George Patton museum. General George S. Patton Jr. was more than a military commander—he was a symbol of relentless determination, innovative strategy, and fearless leadership. Known as one of the most successful and unconventional leaders in American history, Patton's influence spanned two world wars, from commanding the 1st Provisional Tank Brigade in World War I to leading decisive campaigns in the Mediterranean and European Theaters during World War II. His ability to inspire troops, outmaneuver enemies, and pursue victory at all costs cemented his reputation as a military icon.



One of the items in the museum that caught the eye of Bernie and Linda, was an American chestnut box. While it would have been a fantastic story that General Patton used this box during his war campaigns, it turns out the box is simply a book lending library. Nonetheless, it shows that American chestnut is everywhere!



Library-lending book display at the Fort Knox museum made of American chestnut.

WV Chapter Board Member Resigns

Dr. Joseph Golden, long-term board member of the WV chapter, has resigned his position for personal reasons. Dr. Golden is a family medicine physician with 51 years of experience caring for patients of all ages in the Beckley area. He specializes in family medicine, public health and general preventive medicine, and geriatric medicine, providing comprehensive care that focuses on disease prevention and the unique health needs of older adults. His extensive background allows him to offer continuity of care across different life stages while emphasizing preventive health measures. The WV chapter is appreciative of the many years of service he provided. Thanks, Joe.



Dr. Joe Golden

WV Chapter Summer Intern

In February, the WV chapter hired a summer intern, **Will Simpson**. Will was tasked for assessing as many of the 80 chestnut plantings around the State of WV. Will was supposed to begin working on May 19. However, on May 18, Will sent an email indicating that he had taken a full-time position in Maryland. While the goal of a college education is to secure employment, Will's timing was poor. A number of people worked hard to get Will on board for the summer. **Sam Muncy** arranged his schedule to show Will the many chestnut plantings at the Summit Bechtel Reserve. **Robert Sypolt** made a difficult hike to see if the chestnut trees at a Barbour County site were worth visiting. **Cassie Stark** and the employees in Asheville, NC spent time inputting information so that Will could be paid. **Mark Double** spend hours going over the spreadsheet of chestnut plantings making sure the contact information was correct. Needless to say, Will's announcement was quite disappointing. Other arrangements will have to be made to assess the orchards.

An Old WV Chestnut Orchard

Roughly 400 American chestnut trees were planted in a cleared area at Bunner's Ridge in Marion County, WV between 1988-1991. The stand was represented by a variety of chestnut sources: American chestnuts from Michigan; cobalt⁶⁰-irradiated American chestnuts from Maryland; and, hybrid chestnuts (American x Chinese) from TACF. Over the next decade, natural infections became established in the stand.



This is a typical clump of chestnuts at the Bunner's Ridge site, including a dead main stem, living sprouts with and without cankers.



After 20 years, many of the cankers were swollen with extensive callous production.

Over the next decade, natural infections became established in the stand. In 1998, an exchange student from France sampled 25 cankers and obtained a virulent isolate of *Cryphonectria parasitica* (the chestnut blight fungus) from each canker. All 25 virulent isolates were paired with hypovirus-containing isolates with the goal of transmitting a hypovirus to each virulent isolate. The resulting hypovirus-containing isolates were reinoculated into the virulent cankers in the fall of 1998. In 2011, a student intern from Pomona College (California) sampled 50 cankers from the stand and found a number of *C. parasitica* isolates that were virus-containing. This site should be revisited to assess the current condition.