

## Trees

<Kelly> Tucked away in the Catoctin Mountains of Maryland is a small orchard packed with chestnut saplings. Just outside the wire fence 15 volunteers stand in a circle. The manager of the orchard Robert Strasser (read with a soft a) is telling them what they'll be doing today.

<Strasser> "Mostly we'll be up on the ladder pollinating with pollen that came from two places in Maryland. Anybody have any questions? Great well we'll be working on trees on the back corner there, so.."

<Act> walking sounds

<Kelly> The chestnut they're going to pollinate looks more like a weed than a majestic tree. It shoots upwards and the thin trunk barely looks like it can support the weight of all the long leaves.

<Act> background chatter

<Essie> "Somebody clears out a space, and there it comes, WHOOSH, here comes the chestnut!"

<Kelly> Essie Burnworth is president of the Maryland chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. The sapling she's standing under is only seven years old, but *already* it's three times taller than she is. The tree hasn't succumbed to blight yet because one of its great-grandparents is a Chinese chestnut. And Chinese chestnuts are blight-resistant.

<Act> chatter

<Act> We'll have to get you up one of the ladders

Paul Eriksson is standing on the bottom step of the ladder to keep it from moving. He says that 100 years ago, chestnuts played a big part in American life. Carpenters used the rot-resistant American chestnut lumber. And people used to collect chestnuts to eat, sometimes even roasting them on an open fire. He says that losing chestnuts today

<Paul> "Would be like losing bananas or apples. Could you go without bananas? Yeah, would life be as fun? Maybe, maybe not. What would you do with no bananas, no banana splits?"

<Kelly> Before the blight, American chestnuts made up one-fourth of the eastern forests.

**Essie:** “This time of year when they bloom the ranges look snow-capped with white blossoms. You can’t tell that here because there are so few blooms, but the catkins are long and fluffy and white and so when they’re all blooming, it looks gorgeous”.

<**Kelly**> For these chestnut buffs, planting chestnut stands is the closest they’ll come to helping solve the world’s problems. They like to talk about how the nuts are the perfect health food – low in fat, high in protein. The trees can thrive on soil ruined by acid mine drainage, and chestnuts take in so much carbon dioxide as they grow that they’ll slow down global warming. Barbara Knapp says that there’s also a more immediate reward.

<**Barbara**>: “It’s addictive. Once you go down and start seeing orchards and seeing this kind of thing going on and reading about what the chestnut used to look like and seeing pictures of it, I tell you, people go sort of crazy and they spend their lives, oh it’s addictive.”

<**Kelly**> Barbara Knapp works with Essie to run Maryland’s chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. It takes up quite a bit of their time.

<**Essie**> “March and April is very busy planting and then it’ll be all June pollinating and then we have a break until harvest in late September. Uh, I mean, it’s a lot of work.”

<**Kelly**> Just pollinating one tree takes several hours. And they don’t just spray some pollen and leave. They hand pollinate each flower.

<**Act**> Did you get some pollen? Yes I have pollen.

<**Kelly**> The volunteer up on the ladder has paper bags in his belt and he clutches what looks like a prescription drug container. It holds the dried pollen from a particularly resistant American chestnut tree. To pollinate a flower he first shakes the vial to coat the inside of the cap with pollen and then he pops off the plastic cap. The pollen looks like gold dust. He gently rubs the flower in the pollen. Then he (rustling noises) slips a bag over the flower (bagging noises) to keep out any stray pollen floating in the breeze.

<**Kelly**> Pollinating this tree is just one step to producing a majestic blight-free American chestnut.

**Essie:** “This is probably a 150-year project.”

<**Kelly**>: But she doesn’t mind that she’ll never see chestnuts cover the Appalachians again.

<**Essie**>: “When you get to my stage of life you’ve colored a lot of the squares in and you’ve worked and you’ve raised your kids and it’s kind of neat to work on something that’s bigger than you are. And to contribute to something that’s way beyond anything, but might, might have some impact on what your grandchildren have.”

<**Kelly**> By planting and pollinating and harvesting year after year, Essie and others like her will leave a piece of themselves in something they helped create – 100-foot-tall chestnuts to gaze up at. For Intern Edition I’m Kelly Reeves in Washington, D.C.

### **PART I WANT TO FIT IN**

Chinese chestnuts spread and don't grow very tall, BUT they're resistant to the blight. So the strategy of the American Chestnut Foundation is to first cross an American and a Chinese chestnut, and then for each subsequent generation, they cross back to American.

### **(these are my other attempts to fit same info in)**

In two more generations, they should have a chestnut they're happy with to plant in a forest, they'll have to watch it for many years to make sure it stays blight resistant.

The breeding program takes six generations of trees.

since the Chinese are resistant to the blight, you cross the American and the Chinese to begin with. And then successive generations you keep breeding the progeny back to American parents."

Any tree that cankers over from the blight, they weed out.

They're part of a national organization that wants to American chestnut to dominate the forest again.

*NPR's Kelly Reeves finds out why they labor for something they'll never see.*