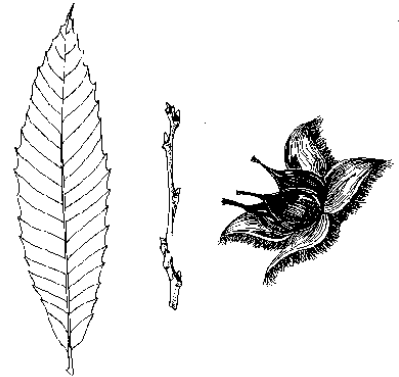


# Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

**Common Name:** American Chestnut (Chestnut)

**Botanical Name:** *Castanea dentata*



**Tree Type:** Deciduous

## **Physical Description:**

**Growth Habit:** The American chestnut is a rapidly growing tree. The bark on young trees is smooth and reddish-brown in color. On older trees the bark is dark brown, shallowly fissured, with broad, scaly ridges. The twigs are stout, greenish-yellow or reddish-brown in color and somewhat swollen at the base of the buds. The pith is star-shaped in the cross section. The oblong, simple, alternate leaves are 10 inches long and 2 inches wide. They are narrow at the base, taper-pointed, sharply toothed and smooth on both sides. The leaves are dark green in color above and paler beneath.

**Height:** The chestnut once grew to a height of 60-80 feet tall, sometimes reaching 100 feet or more with a trunk diameter of 10 feet. More commonly, the trunk diameter was 3-4 feet.

**Shape:** In the forest, the chestnut has a tall, straight trunk free of limbs and a small head. When not crowded, the trunk divides into three or four limbs and forms a low, broad top.

## **Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:**

The flowers are monoecious, small and creamy yellow. They appear in catkins up to 8 inches long. They are separate, but usually appear on the same spike in the summer. The fruit is a light brown burr with spines on the outside and hair on the inside. The burr opens with the first frost exposing and dropping three nuts. The nuts are white, shiny, and woolly at the top. They are sweet and make excellent eating.

## **Range within Maine:**

The chestnut blight fungus has destroyed most of the chestnut trees in Maine. The natural range of American chestnut extended into the southern and central portions of the state. Today, this species occurs infrequently, usually as sprout growth, in the southern half of the state on rich, well-drained soil. This species is hardy to Zone 5.

## **Distinguishing Features:**

The chestnut sprouts readily from stumps and the wood is very durable. The fruit is burr-like. The twigs are stout with star-shaped pith. The leaves are long with widely spaced, sharp teeth.

## **Interesting Features:**

The wood is soft, very durable, strong, splits easily, and is rich in tannic acid. Historically it was used for lumber, telephone poles, posts, coffins, interior finishing and tannin.

## **Relationship to Wildlife:**

Deer, squirrels, grouse, black bears and birds ate chestnuts; it was a dietary staple. Most of these species now browse other nuts such as acorns, walnuts, beechnuts and hickory nuts.

## **Landscape Use:**

The American chestnut is a forest tree.

## **Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:**

The American chestnut once accounted for a third or more of the trees covering the Appalachian chain. It has been claimed that a squirrel could go from Maine to Georgia by jumping from chestnut to chestnut without touching the ground. In 1904, the chestnut blight fungus (*Endothia parasitica*) swept through the range and the chestnut forests vanished. There are national efforts underway to develop blight resistant trees.

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