

American Chestnut Trees Return To The New York Botanical Garden

Exciting news! American chestnut trees are returning to the site where the chestnut blight was first discovered. On April 18, 2012, test trees produced by the New York State American Chestnut Research & Restoration Program at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) will be planted at the New York Botanical Garden (the Garden) in the Bronx, NY.

The Garden is 250 acres of pristine land in New York City where the Chestnut Blight was discovered in 1904. For the past 25 years, Dr. William Powell and Dr. Charles Maynard, with the help of the NY chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation and others, have been researching and developing techniques to produce a resistant variety of the American Chestnut. Currently they have more than 100 varieties either in field trials or waiting to be tested.

At 3 p.m. on April 18th, in the Ross Lecture Hall at the Garden, they will be speaking on the economic and ecological importance of the American chestnut tree, their research progress, and descriptions of the trees that are about to be planted. Following their lecture, at approximately 4:30 p.m. they will plant some promising varieties of genetically engineered trees on a carefully selected site in the Garden. They cannot be certain if any of these particular trees will be “the one” variety destined for the restoration program, but there is that possibility. They have permission to remove and replace trees as test results come in. With more than 100 varieties awaiting field tests, they are confident that at least one will have enough blight resistance to become the next American Chestnut.

Following the planting, at 6:00 p.m. in a beautiful old stone mill on the Bronx River in the heart of the Garden, there will be a reception and dinner. The event will include recognition of key supporters and a brief synopsis of the research to date by Drs. Powell and Maynard. Coincidentally and fittingly, the floors of the mill are made of chestnut.

Because of this celebrated event’s location in New York City and the associated costs, there are fees for the lecture (approximately \$30) and the reception/dinner (\$100). However, given the historical significance of the New York Botanical Garden and the discovery of the blight, it seems appropriate that these functions should be held there.

Reservations are required. Sponsorships for the event are being solicited in amounts of \$1,000 and more. Sponsorships will be used to defray the costs of the event and net proceeds will be used to further chestnut research. If you would like to receive an official invitation or sponsorship information, contact the SUNY-ESF Alumni Office at 315-470-6632, or email alumni@esf.edu.

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