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## Community Happenings

# Chestnut trees examined at Merryspring to find blight-resistant specimens

By Staff

CAMDEN (July 7): Volunteers from the American Chestnut Foundation on June 20 inoculated about 100 American chestnut trees at Merryspring Park in Camden and at another plantation in Weeks Mills with the fungus that caused the blight that killed most of the chestnut trees during the early part of the last century.

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The testing on the six-year-old trees will reveal which ones have a genetic makeup that resists infection by the disease and is a continuation of the process begun in June 2007 when 200 trees at Merryspring were inoculated.



Volunteers examine developing flowers on an American chestnut tree at Merryspring. (Photo by Amy Campbell)

Eric Evans, co-founder and breeding coordinator of the Maine chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, will speak about the work the Maine chapter has done during the past 12 years on Thursday, July 9 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Merryspring. The program will include a walk in the Merryspring chestnut plantation for a full explanation of the project, including the inoculation process.

Merryspring trees and Weeks Mills trees, as well as trees in 10 other locations around the

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state, were grown from seeds generated by pollinating wild Maine trees with pollen from the American chestnut breeding farm in Meadowview, Va., home of the science arm of the foundation. The pollen in turn was from trees that have a blight-resistant Chinese chestnut great-grandparent. The breeding program, which has been under way since 1983, is a main effort of the foundation, whose goal is to be able to reintroduce the American chestnut with blight resistance to forests where it was once one of the dominant hardwood trees.



Eric Evans drills a hole in the bark of an American chestnut tree for inoculation by the blight fungus. (Photo by Amy Campbell)

The inoculation was accomplished by first drilling small holes in the bark of the trees. A small plug excised from a culture dish of the fungus was installed in the hole and a piece of tape was placed across the site to keep the plug in place. If the tree has little or no resistance, the fungus will take hold and form a canker that spreads outward from the inoculation site. In the case of a tree that has resistance, the size of the canker will be much smaller, since the fungus will not grow as fast or as easily. The trees tested in 2007 were examined in the fall that year and then again in the spring of 2008, at which time the ones that had the largest infections were cut down. The remaining trees, although they still show signs of fungal growth at the inoculation site, have formed ridges of growth that wall off the fungus on their trunks and some of these will be allowed to interbreed and to produce seeds. These seeds will be planted and tested in the search for trees that are fully blight-resistant, a process that is expected to take another eight to 10 years in Maine.

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
Volunteers from the American Chestnut Foundation work in the chestnut plantation at Merryspring. (Photo by Amy Campbell)

The Maine chapter is one of 15 state chapters conducting the breeding program. The Virginia and Pennsylvania chapters are already producing trees that are highly blight resistant. The trees are yielding seeds that will be rigorously tested in forested settings but some seeds will be distributed to members of the American Chestnut Foundation for less formal tests.



A plug containing the blight fungus is inserted in a hole in the bark of an American chestnut tree to test the tree's resistance to the blight. (Photo by Chuck Marcic)

The Village NetMedia news staff can be reached at 594-4401 or by e-mail at [news@villagesoup.com](mailto:news@villagesoup.com).

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