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## Guard works with chestnut trees

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• JULY 27, 2009

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An effort is under way in West Tennessee to revive a tree that once was prevalent throughout much of the eastern United States.

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A tree orchard recently set up at the Tennessee Army [National Guard's](#) Lavinia training site will examine the American chestnut tree, which was decimated by a fungus that arrived more than 100 years ago.

The Tennessee National Guard is working on program with the American Chestnut Foundation, which began the restoration project more than 20 years ago. The fast-growing trees were valued for their integral roles in the [ecosystem](#), as food sources and as a lumber source for furniture.

Today, more than 500 chestnuts at the Volunteer Training Site Milan orchard are being tested for ways to fight off the blight disease. The method of "back-crossbreeding" American chestnuts with their blight-resistant predecessors is being used.

The goal is to have a hybrid Chinese and American chestnut tree able to cross back to the American versions, which once numbered in the billions in the United States. The trees would then provide pollen and seeds to create a new generation of highly resistant trees, according to the National Guard.

"In this case, backcrossing is being used to get trees that hold onto only a small portion of the genetic code from their Chinese ancestors - blight resistance - but that still look like American chestnut trees," said Janie Becker, an environmental biologist for the National Guard. "Because healthy American chestnuts grow so rapidly, they could be important features in our efforts to mitigate [global warming](#) by their uptake and storage of carbon from the atmosphere."

By 1904, the first documented case of the fungal blight was recorded at the New York Zoological Garden. By the 1950s, much of the American chestnut population east of the Mississippi was wiped out, Becker said.

"As the blight spread from tree to tree, it reproduced rapidly, with each new host American chestnut harboring millions of infectious spores."

As of 2007 there were only 117 known American chestnut trees in West Tennessee, mainly in Hardeman and Fayette counties, according to a study by Joe Schibig, a professor at Volunteer State Community College.



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OldTimer1933 wrote:

I appreciate the information provided by folks more knowledgeable than I, but I think we should be far more wary of 'solutions' than we were in the past when we ALLOWED a lot of pestilences to our shores such as fire ants, and kudzu. Of course, many of the 'solutions' were intended to be 'beneficial', and that is what worries me about hasty political solutions.

Time and again we hear "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" and we even speak of 'preventive medicine' and YET we have politicians rushing headlong into areas that have consequences far worse than kudzu and fire ants or even tree blight,

or as 1USACITIZEN wrote: 'governmental "progress" promoting self destruction'.

7/27/2009 8:37:26 AM

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1USACITIZEN wrote:

The American Chestnut used to be an American icon but the Chinese blight destroyed it. We currently have another Chinese blight (thanks to hope and change) destroying an American icon ---The Constitution of the United States.

The Mountain Pine Beetle is also wreaking havoc on the pines in Colorado. I was in the Rocky Mountain National Park last year and was stunned by miles and miles of dead pine trees. The rangers said the government needs to allow the natural forest fires (from lightning strikes) to burn the dead trees instead of rushing to put out the fires allowing the beetles to continue their rampage. Another example of governmental "progress" promoting self destruction.

7/27/2009 8:22:06 AM

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shakinghead wrote:

There used to be a couple of chestnut trees at the back end of Westwood Gardens, but I guess the city, in its infinite wisdom, must have bulldozed them when they cleared everything else.

Actually, chestnut blight is caused by an Asian bark fungus accidentally introduced into North America on imported Asiatic chestnut trees, which had naturally developed a strong resistance to the blight.

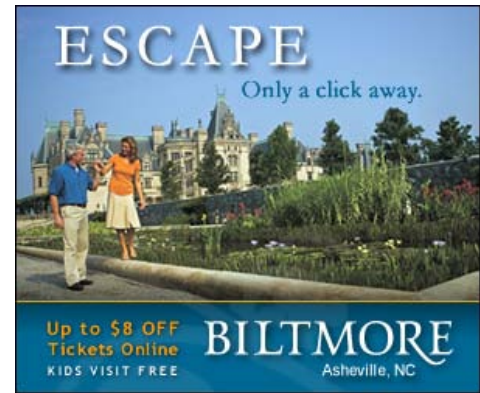
7/27/2009 7:42:49 AM

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OldTimer1933 wrote:

I always think of canaries in mines when I read of such things. Could it be that



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'industrialization' pollutants could be the cause of the 'fungus' -- you know, like a bit of battery acid on the skin? Of course, I don't want to be giving Al Gore and the greenies any more ammunition, and unless the solution IS in genetics, we must learn to cope -- although I do miss roasted chestnuts.

A lot of other things have disappeared as a result of 'progress'. Sort of makes one wonder, doesn't it, whether it is really progress or self-destruction?

7/27/2009 6:37:26 AM

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