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## Chestnuts On the Rebound in Prospect Park

Today, the American Chestnut Foundation presented Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens with 10 blight-resistant American chestnut seeds.

By [Kristen V. Brown \(users/kristen-v-brown-2\)](#) | [Email the author \(#\)](#) | March 24, 2011

1 of 9



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Planting the hybrid, blight resistant chestnuts. Credit [KristenV.Brown](http://users/kristen-v-brown-2) (<http://users/kristen-v-brown-2>)

### PHOTOS



(<http://o3.aolcdn.com/dims-shared/dims3/PATCH/resize/600x450/h>)

A once-abundant resident of Prospect Park is fighting its way back.

Chestnut trees are making a comeback, decades after an early 20th century blight wiped out a local tree population the numbered more than 1,400.

Now, officials at Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens have the seeds that they hope will return the majestic, nut-producing tree to its former grandeur.

Today, the [American Chestnut Foundation \(http://www.acf.org/\)](http://www.acf.org/) presented Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens with 10 American chestnut seeds – a variety of the tree that is virtually extinct. These seeds are not just any seeds, but a blight-resistant, hybrid variety that promises the hope of revitalizing the native chestnut species.

“This is an iconic tree that really represents America and it was nearly wiped out,” said Bryan Burhans, President and CEO of the American Chestnut Foundation. “We’re here to say that it’s back.”

Garfield Street resident Bart Chezar is in part responsible for bringing the hybrid seeds to Prospect Park. In 2004 Chezar, who is better known for his efforts to [restore oysters to New York Harbor \(http://www.brooklynpaper.com/stories/31/45/31\\_45\\_bm\\_oysters.html\)](http://www.brooklynpaper.com/stories/31/45/31_45_bm_oysters.html), helped with the planting of a handful of purebred American chestnuts near the picnic house in Prospect Park. He has since kept a watchful eye over the trees – eight of which have survived – “pruning the trees when nobody is looking.”

One of the trees even fruited and flowered this year, but sadly, without blight-resistant characteristics, these trees will likely meet their end, too.

At the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, one of the garden’s purebred chestnuts is already affected by the blight.

So Chezar asked the American Chestnut Foundation, of which he is a member, for some of its blight-resistant nuts – a crossbreed of the American chestnut and the blight-resistant Chinese chestnut. A week and a half ago they arrived in a box, where they remained, on a shelf in his refrigerator, until today.

Today’s presentation, though, was just a photo op – the seeds will now make their way to Staten Island’s Greenbelt Native Plant Center, where they will mature into saplings and return to Brooklyn for planting in about a year.

The hope is that the blight-resistant nuts will pollinate the purebred American chestnut trees, thus preserving the American native.

As late as the 1800s, the American chestnut tree was abundant throughout the United States – a major food and lumber source for many areas, including New York City. Once the saplings are planted, extra care will be taken to protect them from rabbits, which enjoy munching on the young plants.

In Prospect Park, the seeds will eventually be planted near the existing purebred American chestnuts and on the peninsula near Prospect Park Lake. At the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, they will be planted in the Native Flora Garden.

“I would love for people to be able to come here and learn about the chestnut tree,” said Chezar. “It used to play such an important role.”