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NEWS Re-Introducing a Near-Extinct Species to Prospect Park

Posted by [Henry Stewart](#) on Fri, Mar 25, 2011 at 2:08 PM

Yesterday, the seeds for ten chestnut trees were presented to Prospect Park officials; when planted next year (saplings will first be grown in a Staten Island nursery), they will be the first American chestnut trees in decades with a probable chance of surviving.



The new super-chestnuts, coming soon to Brooklyn

American chestnuts thrived in New York in the 19th century, when they numbered close to 1,400, the Park Slope Patch **reports**. They were valued for their lumber and fruits. But blight rendered the trees nearly extinct. "In 1904 a single American Chestnut tree in the Bronx Zoo in New York City was found with a strange fungus growing on it," **writes** Oliver Hulland on the Confluence Culture blog. "Within 20 years, 3.5 billion trees had succumbed to the fungus. By some accounts, more than a quarter of all trees in forests that stretched from Maine to Georgia disappeared." Today, there are eight chestnut trees in Brooklyn, planted in Prospect Park in 2004 by enthusiast and park volunteer Bart Chezar, who lives on Garfield Place. It's not a question of if those trees will succumb to blight, but when. One, in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, already has.

Chezar, who years ago was behind reintroducing oysters to New York harbor, was a driving force behind procuring these new seeds from the American Chestnut Foundation: they are blight-resistant. "For almost 30 years," the *Daily News* **reports**, "the group has working on a hybrid by cross-breeding an American tree with a Chinese one that's immune to the disease." (Never mind that the Chinese Chestnut was responsible for this mess in the first place!) The hope is restore a once-iconic tree to its rightful position of prominence.

While resistant to blight, the saplings will be vulnerable to a different predator: rabbits, which the Park Slope Patch reports enjoy gnawing on the baby trees. Let's hope rabbits don't become the new **geese**.

[photo]

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