



AMERICAN CHESTNUT

Castanea dentata (Marsh.) Borkh.



Most of the chestnut trees in Maine have been destroyed by the chestnut blight fungus, *Endothia parasitica*. There are national efforts underway to develop blight-resistant trees of this once very important tree species.

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The fruit of American chestnut is contained in a very prickly bur.

The natural range of American chestnut only extended into southern and central portions of the state. Chestnut now occurs infrequently, usually as sprout growth, in the southern half of the state on rich, well-drained soil. It has been planted occasionally as far north as Orono. The tree grows rapidly. In the forest, it has a tall, straight trunk free of limbs, and a small head. When not crowded, the trunk divides into 3 or 4 limbs and forms a low, broad top. It reaches a height of 60–70 feet and a diameter of 15–30 inches.

The **bark** on the trunks of old trees is dark brown and divided into broad, flat ridges by shallow, irregular fissures. On young stems, it is smooth and dark gray with a green tinge.

The **leaves** are coarsely-toothed and hooked, with the leaf margin rounded between the teeth. Leaves are alternate, 5–8 inches long, yellow-green and smooth on both surfaces.

The **fruit** is a prickly bur containing 2–3 nuts tipped with hairs. The inner lining of the bur is plush-like.



The **nuts** contain a sweet meat; they were once gathered in large quantities for the market.

The **wood** is soft, very durable, strong and splits easily. It is used for interior finishing and was once in much demand—prior to the blight—for telephone poles, railroad ties, beams and timbers up to 50 feet in length, furniture stock and fence posts. The durability of the wood is due to the tannic acid that it contains.



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American Chestnut Circumference: 117" Height: 45' Crown Spread: 44' Location: Orono

