

Chestnut Trees May Thrive Again

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YORK (York Co.) — In the year 1520, a member of DeSoto's expedition exclaimed, "Where there be mountains, there be chestnuts."

Unfortunately because of an exotic fungus — an Asian organism — accidentally imported and first discovered on New York City chestnut trees in 1904, the statement no longer rings true.

However the prognosis for the tree is improving thanks to the energetic lot who are all members of The American Chestnut Foundation

The Pennsylvania Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation is located in York, where office manager and foundation member Dave Armstrong, a retired military man who devotes his time to helping to develop an American Chestnut Tree that is immune to the blight, answers phone calls about the project

One of Pennsylvania's breeding sites is on land by his home near Codorus State Park. Armstrong is working with eight different types of American Chestnut Trees in an attempt to find one that will not be susceptible to the fungus. The American Chestnut Tree had no resistance to the imported fungus which caused the chestnuts' extinction.

Of the project Armstrong said, "It's a passion," noting it feels good to know you can make a difference.

Another breeding site is on the Southern York County property of Ann and Bob Leffel where 400 specimen line up in a field. Bob Leffel, a former plant breeder with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is just as devoted to the trees as Armstrong. He stands by his nursery and quietly responds to a question about his enthusiasm for the project by stating, "I suppose there's a romance to it."

His demeanor brings to mind the English proverb "He who plants a tree loves others besides himself."

Leffel works in conjunction with his wife, Ann, who has put in long hours as the past president of the Pennsylvania chapter. She talks about the journeys into the forests to find healthy trees for pollination purposes and calls the breeding program a form of planned parenthood

Bob Leffel, who often lapses into scientific jargon about the backcross method of plant breeding being used, explains that the American Chestnut Tree was once the dominant species over much of the Eastern U.S. forests. It no longer is, although some healthy trees have been found in Michaux State Forest near Chambersburg. There are forests throughout the Commonwealth that have not yet been explored, Armstrong said.

In literature provided by the foundation it is reported that at one time the American Chestnut ranged from Maine south to Georgia and from the Piedmont west to the Ohio valley. In the heart of its range only a few generations ago, a count of trees would have turned up one chestnut for every four oaks, birches, maples, and other hardwoods.



In an attempt to develop disease resistant trees, Bob and Ann Leffel nurture chestnut trees at the breeding nursery located on their property in Southern York County. The timber from the tree is straight-grained, lighter in weight than oak, and more easily worked. It is rot resistant and before the trees extinction, the wood was used for telegraph poles, railroad ties, shingles, paneling, fine furniture, musical instruments, pulp, and almost everything wood related.

Many of the dry ridgetops of the central Appalachians were so thoroughly crowded with chestnut that, in early summer, when their canopies were filled with creamy-white flowers, the mountains appeared snow-capped.

Native wildlife from birds to bears, squirrels to deer, depended on the tree's abundant crops of nutritious nuts.

Chestnuts were also a cash crop for Appalachian families and were shipped by the railroad car-full to New York, Philadelphia, and other large cities where street vendors sold them fresh-roasted.

TOWANDA (Bradford Co.) — The war coverage, like kids' cartoons, can become addictive. Many hours of TV bring the horrors of war into our home. What should concern us is the possible effect this non-stop coverage might have on children. Even more importantly, what can parents do to ease a child's fear?

Recently, the National Association for the Education of Young Children issued a warning about media violence. They went on record as condemning violent television programming, movies, videotapes, and computer games.

What is particularly dangerous in the present Iraq situation is the apparent innocence of the TV programming. The nightly news or the network news brief, carries the violent programming! It's not the hour-long sitcom or weekly shoot-em-up program.

Research has shown time and time again that violence on TV is not healthy for developing children. Three problems are associated with heavy viewing of violence on television.

• Children may become less

They've also made their way into song and poetry.

But it's fruit was not the tree's only value. It was one of the best for timber. It grew straight and often branch-free for up to 50 feet. Straight-grained, lighter in weight than oak and more easily worked, chestnut was as rot resistant as redwood. It was used for virtually everything — telegraph poles, railroad ties, shingles, paneling, fine furniture, musical instruments, pulp and plywood.

And now with much hard work the national foundation hopes to "have a very limited

War, TV And Our Children

sensitive to the pain and suffering of those around them. Simply put, children who view heavy doses of violence just "get used to it."

• Children may become more fearful of the world around them, if they view lots of TV violence.

• Viewing large amounts of TV violence leads many children to act in an aggressive or harmful manner.

Meanness and fighting increase.

Sometimes the effects are immediate. One mother told of her 13-year-old son who seven years ago during the Gulf War sat watching the news from the Gulf and observed the close-up bombing raids and the effects of the high-tech bombs. Immediately he switched on the Nintendo game and proceed to continue the "bombing raids" using a game.

"It was frightening" the mother said, "it was almost like the Gulf and his game were the same."

Parents have a tough job. On the one hand most parents want their children to be interested. Most want their children to have human concern. This is best



Leffel points to telltale signs of the fungus that attacks chestnut trees. The fungus wiped out the prolific chestnuts during the early 1900s. Before the imported fungus spread, the ridgetops of the central Appalachians were so thoroughly crowded with chestnut trees that the mountains appeared snow-capped with the trees creamy-white flowers during the early summer season. Chestnut trees are reported to have been the most dominant species over much of the eastern United States' forests.

release by 2006," according to Bob Leffel.

He has many good things to say about the late Dr. Charles R. Burnham, a genetist and founder of the American Chestnut Foundation. So does *Agronomy News*, which wrote a tribute to him after his death in 1996, calling him "A scholar to be emulated."

His 70-year career continued even from his nursing home room where he was writing a manuscript addressing important questions concerning how chromosomes pair and adding to a book called "Genetics is For

Everyone."

Restoration of the chestnut trees was a priority, and when he retired from the University of Minnesota in 1972, he founded the nonprofit foundation to develop a disease resistant tree by using methods not previously employed and a research farm in Virginia was dedicated to this effort.

It is Burnham's work that Leffels and Armstrong actively pursue through their American Chestnut Tree nurseries.

Anyone interested in joining or supporting the foundation can reach Armstrong at (717) 852-0035 for more information.

achieved by keeping up to date and watching the news programs. On the other hand, children can get too much real life violence and suffer some of the problems mentioned before, like being fearful of the world. Balancing these two is difficult. If different age children are present it's even more touchy.

Parents can help their children understand and understanding will help minimize the effect of violence on TV. View the news together. Talk about what is happening. Often children have incomplete or false ideas about what they are seeing. They don't understand the news person who is explaining an event. Get our a globe or large map. Most libraries have a globe, so do schools. Use the globe to show your child where the war is and where he lives. Children sometimes fear a bomb will drop on their home.

If your child is afraid, and many are, talking helps. Allow your child to talk. Parents should make time to listen. Try to figure out what the child is afraid of. Help your child understand what she is afraid of and help her find the dif-

ference between fantasy and reality.

One child, whose house is near an airport, screamed out when an airplane came over his house. His father calmly admitted that the sound of an airplane could be scary. They also talked about all the hundreds of planes that had gone over before. "They are landing at the airport. This one you heard landed just like all the others. Tomorrow, you and I will drive by the airport and try to see the plane that landed. Now, go back to sleep."

For additional information on coping with war contact the Extension Office at (570) 265-2896 or 701 South Fourth Street, Towanda, PA 18848. Please specify if you need information to help young children, elementary age children, teens, adults, or families with a loved one deployed.

If you have access to the Internet you may want to search the College of Agricultural Sciences, PenPages, for information at <<http://www.penpages.psu.edu/search.htm>>. Use the keywords "Desert Storm" or "war."