

American Chestnut Cooperators' Foundation

2018 Newsletter

Report via accf-online.org/report.htm or to Forest Service Road 708, Newport, VA 24128

Dear Friends and Cooperating Growers:

GROWER REPORTS:

Thanks to 81 growers who reported last fall and winter a total of 1,356 ACCF chestnuts surviving. After abandoning another plot where bedrock might be too near the surface for American chestnuts, in my 15 remaining plots, I counted 583 chestnuts, not including those in scattered woodland nurseries which cannot be planted in their permanent sites till late fall.

2017 HARVEST:

I was delighted with last fall's harvest, even though we can no longer tell how many chestnuts were distributed. Helpers came from OH, PA, VA, TN, WV, NC and MN. They distributed chestnuts in a few other states as well as their own. Several harvesters brought family along and all pitched in, as in the good old days before blight killed our chestnut forests. Many thanks to these outstanding cooperators: Bill & Ruth Valentine, Mark Gunn, Jeff & Jonah Bokal, Darin & Joe Carr, Douglas Burton, Steve Knott, Jim Reilly, Dick Stoffer, Jim & Marsha Raitmaier, Johnny Gobble & family, Rodney Owens & family, Mark Castator, Mr. & Mrs. Lucas Tyree, Loren Hostetter, Dennis Rohrer, Carlton Hensley, Chris Russel. Many 2017 chestnuts could be open-pollinated double crosses (genes from four different parents). I look forward to learning how many are growing and following their progress in your reports.

2018 HARVEST:

Judging from the early appearance of receptive female flowers in both breeding orchards, I guess this fall's harvest may be earlier than last, with the largest volume of nuts dropping in mid-September. Open harvest dates, when you may come to pick burs or pick up chestnuts will be on September 4, 10, 17, 22, 24, & 29 and October 1. Sign up early allaccf@gmail.com, to be sure of getting your desired date. I shall verify your choice by return mail. Everyone who plans to participate will receive a sheet of directions to the Airport and the Big Field on Mt. Lake, along with what to wear and complete chestnut processing information. We start at 9 a.m. at

the Airport, after finishing there go to Mt Lake, and the work is usually done by noon.

I have so far 17 early requests from growers in IL, MD, VA, ME, NE, AR, NH, MO, NC & TN to participate in this year's harvest. For those of you who cannot come, but must rely on others, we cannot guarantee you will get chestnuts. Last year, several requests could not be filled because the assigned harvester was unable to contact the grower by phone or e-mail. Perhaps I miscopied the phone number. Computer security systems are often set up to put mail from an unrecognized address directly into the trash. One gentleman has given his text messaging phone number. This might solve the problem if all involved had this technology.

GALL WASPS & ambrosia beetle.

We found serious infestations of gall wasp in the Airport, Big Field and our yard. I have been dealing with this problem since the second week in April. **The granular Bayer Advanced product does not work** in clay soils (Airport), and appears to be unreliable elsewhere, even in well drained, sandy loam (our yard). I beg pardon from anyone who may have tried this product last year on my recommendation.

I have switched to **liquid Ferti-lome Tree & Shrub**, another systemic insect drench. I used it at the Airport, in our yard and the Big Field. I had tried it last year in the forest plots out in Giles County (thanks to Harry Cooper who carried the water needed to mix the drench). This year in those plots I have found no gall wasp, except on one, small native chestnut. Also, a tall striped maple in another plot was killed by ambrosia beetle, which has killed chestnuts there in past years. The drench protects against a wide variety of insects, including these two pests. Meanwhile, applying drench up in the Big Field, I discovered ambrosia beetle pinholes in two of my grafts and one seedling. When caught early, before the young have emerged, you can kill the insects by spraying Permethrin into each hole and possibly save the tree. A second step is required for chestnuts in which ambrosia beetles have drilled: you plug the dry pinholes with soft putty or cover with masking tape to prevent entry of the blight fungus.

I do not treat chestnuts with circumference over 30 inches. It doesn't seem worthwhile since ambrosia beetles do not bore into thick-barked trees, and it appears that the gall wasp prefers to inhabit buds on the lower branches, thus may

leave the lofty crowns free to grow and flower. **The chemical treatment, Fertlome, is systemic, thus, most of our chestnuts should not be eaten.**

Preparations and application of the insect drench is very hard work: after stripping galls from the branches within reach, sawing away fully infested branches, weeding around the base and digging a moat (on steep slopes) or at least turning the soil inside each protection cage (on level ground), one must wait till the soil is dry before mixing and applying the product. I can do only two hours of this kind of work at a time and require a day's recovery in between bouts. Thus, it has become mathematically impossible for me to treat all chestnuts in our woodland plots as well as the breeding orchards. So, I am counting on my dream to come true (see below). In what remains of this summer, I shall treat roughly one third of our forest chestnuts, including the grafts, plus trees nearest the forest road, and leave the rest without protection against insects. After all, these are research plots.

GRAFTING PROJECT:

On two of our original chestnut blight survivors, over the years I have found no gall wasp galls, but only a few curled leaves in which the galls appeared to have been aborted. This year, where nearly all of the other chestnuts were heavily infested, once again, no galls appeared on my grafts of these two trees at all locations. A few intercroses in which one or the other was the mother tree also had no galls this year. Between 2003 and 2004, I made 12 intercroses using these two parents; they have shown no gall wasp damage. They are planted in the forest plot below our yard; many are over 50 feet tall, and none have made chestnuts. This spring, a few grafts of them succeeded in the Big Field and another in a forest plot. My project to get their pollen into both breeding orchards will probably take several years; meanwhile it inspires dreams, such as: all our plots might be improved by grafting the gall wasp resistant intercroses into stump sprouts wherever an established chestnut has failed, thus, incidentally decreasing the numbers requiring protection against gall wasp. And, in the right environment, some of them might make nuts within 10 years instead of 15.

WOODLAND PLANTING

One day last summer Mark Miller, USDA-FS, assembled a crew of professional volunteers from several Ranger Stations to clear competing trees, brush & briars in our Jefferson National Forest chestnut plots out in Giles County. He assigned two or three to each of five plots, all chain saw certified, and himself cut away the

shading trees and briars in the plot where I was working that day. I thank these good people every day I work there, and very much regret not having taken down their names to cite here as our most outstanding cooperators.

We give thanks for our good health and heritage, the most interesting job one could imagine, working in a pleasant environment, cooperating growers who faithfully report, all the volunteers who have helped over the years, the younger people who show determination and ability to keep the project going when we no longer can, the good rains that make our chestnuts grow, and the bad gall wasp that showed us how to make some breeding improvements.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucille Griffin, Executive Director

Other ACCF Directors

Gary Griffin, President, Plant Pathology, Virginia Tech

Ed Greenwell, Vice President & Director of Tennessee chestnut projects, Electrical Engineer, New Johnsonville, TN

John Rush Elkins, Secretary, Professor Emeritus Chemistry, Concord College, WV

Joyce G. Foster, Treasurer, Research Biochemist, Beaver, WV.

Dave McCurdy, Director & Nursery Superintendent Emeritus, Raleigh, NC

Dedicated to the restoration of American chestnuts