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Special Issue: Chestnut Outreach and Education Projects

American Chestnut Habitat Modeling in Shenandoah National Park

How to Involve the Next Generation in Chestnut Restoration

3 MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Fond Farewell
By Bryan Burhans



4 NEWS FROM TACF

Meadowview Research Farms' 25th Anniversary
Mine Land Reforestation Plantings in 2014
TACF Welcomes Our New Members

8 TACF's ANNUAL MEETING

Join Us at the Northern Virginia 4-H Educational
Conference Center in Front Royal, Virginia



**11 BOOK REVIEW:
HEMLOCK - A FOREST GIANT ON THE EDGE**

An Insightful Collection of Essays on the History, Ecology,
and Social Significance of Eastern Hemlock in New England
By Dr. Fred Paillet

12 AMERICAN CHESTNUT HABITAT MODELING

Identifying Suitable Sites for Chestnut Restoration in
Shenandoah National Park
By Jennifer Santoro



14 RESTORATION BRANCHES: BUILDING OUR RANKS

Outreach Events Are Key to Our Success
By Bryan Burhans

**16 SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA RESTORATION
BRANCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE**

One of TACF's First Restoration Branches Shares Their Story
By Members of the Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch

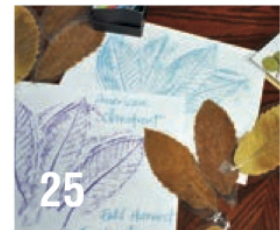


**20 PLANTING AMERICAN CHESTNUT
SEEDS OF LEARNING**

What's New with TACF's Education Program
By Kathy Marmet

25 INVOLVE THE NEXT GENERATION

Engaging Lesson Plans for Chestnut Games and
Teachable Moments
By Johanna Jackson



28 RECIPE

Hungarian Chestnut Ice Cream

29 CHESTNUT MOMENTS

Bagged chestnut burs at Meadowview Research Farms. Background photo by Ruth Gregory Goodridge

Involve the Next Generation: Chestnut Games and Teachable Moments

As many of the members of TACF are aging, our Pennsylvania/New Jersey Chapter has renewed its focus on education for children, especially those in elementary school. We have been working with Project Learning Tree, the American Forest Foundation's educational outreach program for teachers and nature center leaders, to create activities about the American chestnut.

The following activities were developed by Johanna Jackson at Shaver's Creek Environmental Center. They worked well for school-aged kids, with some variation between older and younger kids. Shaver's Creek used them at family festivals, but they could also be adapted for school field trips to an orchard, or outreach programs at schools. *Have fun and adapt as you wish!*

The Chestnut Spoon Race

Age: 4-12 years old

Time: About 10-15 minutes, depending on the age group

Materials:

- (2) 20-foot ropes for a starting and finish line
- Stopwatch
- Seeds of American chestnut and Chinese chestnut, one chestnut per child
- About 30 feet of open lawn space (check for protruding roots and rocks)
- Teaspoons
- Ice cream scoops
- Measuring cups, such as quarter cups
- Ladles
- Large serving spoons
- Whisks
- Other kitchen implements that are safe for kids
- Bandanas, one for every two participants (optional)
- Small clay pots or planters for the finish line (optional)



Ready...set...go! Children of all ages line up to play the Chestnut Spoon Race during Shaver's Creek Environmental Center's Family Day event. Photo courtesy of Johanna Jackson

Set-up:

With the 20-foot ropes, create a starting and finish line. Place clay pots or planters at the finish line for kids to deposit their chestnuts for "planting." Spread the kitchen implements on a table for everyone to have access to.

Description:

This game becomes inviting if you set it up to be fun. Explain to the kids that they will be racing with a chestnut from the starting line to the finish line. Invite them to check out the kitchen implements—spoons, scoops, and various cups—over on a table, and let the kids each choose the one they want to use. Try to have duplicates of every tool so that each kid has the opportunity for a choice. Older kids will have fun with this part, and deciding how much challenge they want to take on. (Can you really carry a chestnut inside of a whisk? What

HOW-TO

happens if you try?) You can steer younger kids toward success by encouraging them to use tools that seem easier, such as the ice cream scoop.

Ask kids to line up behind the starting line and hand out a chestnut to each one. You might offer some variety with Chinese and American chestnuts. This is a good time to get familiar with the chestnut seeds. Ask kids to feel if it is fuzzy or smooth, and ask them to compare it to a neighbor's. Are they different sizes? Why might that be?

From where they stand, ask the kids to look out on the racetrack for any roots and rocks. Children will be more invested in being safe if you recruit their help in identifying what's safe/unsafe. You might describe how the kids are just like volunteers working in the chestnut orchards, taking care of saplings. Have them flex their muscles, do a special finger stretch, whatever they'd like to do to get ready. Remember, each person wins, as long as they deliver the chestnut seed safely to its home. Then, start the race!

As the coach, you might call out times as they cross the line. Encourage kids to cheer on the younger ones who finish last. If they're having fun, offer the option of a second race. Kids can exchange their kitchen implement for another if they'd like.

Variations:

You can continue with a "three-legged" race, using bandanas to tie together two participants at the knees. Pull the bandanas tight if possible.

If you are working with a variety of ages, you might create separate heats, one for older kids and one for younger kids.

If you are at a family event with parents or camp counselors on the sidelines, you can create another round that includes the adults. Let the parents know that their kids may come to recruit them to join the race. You might pull out a "secret stock" of supplies from the kitchen—forks, cheese graters, and anything that would be hard to use to carry a chestnut. In some cases the children choose the tool for their parents and race along with them. Older elementary kids may enjoy having this power over their parents for a bit. If you run this version, be mindful of the adults' comfort level. Some parents may feel self-conscious. You can make it easier for them by making it a race with both kids and adults; then they won't feel foolish.

Debrief:

After the game, gather older kids together for a "team huddle" and talk about the race. This works best for older kids, ages 8-12. Debrief by asking questions such as:

- Did you choose a hard tool or an easy tool?
- Which tools worked best?
- What was it like to deliver the nut to its planter?
- What was it like to watch your parents race too?

Then discuss ways that people help the American chestnut in real life. Brainstorm a list with the youth. This could include planting seeds, volunteering at a local orchard, or watching the health of chestnut trees. If there is a local TACF chapter in your community, talk about what's happening locally.



In this variation of the Chestnut Spoon Race, participants' legs are tied together with bandanas for a "three-legged" race. Photo courtesy of Johanna Jackson

Chestnut Leaf Rubbings

Age: 4-8 years old

Time: This activity fits well into short stations or in a festival setting

Materials:

- Chestnut leaves, laminated, of different varieties (American chestnut, Chinese chestnut, etc.)
- A bucket of crayons with the papers peeled off
- Scrap paper cut in half

Description:

This activity can help to develop awareness for leaf shape and a delight in creating one's own art. Demonstrate to each child how to put the leaf below the page, and use the side of a crayon to rub over the top. Don't expect children to be immersed in the science of chestnut trees, however. Keep your questions simple. Can you see the veins on the leaf? What are those for? Can you see the jagged line on the edge?

Helpful Tips:

The activity works best when you demonstrate to the child how to use the side of the crayon. The crayon papers must be peeled off.

Variations:

Start with a leaves that look like American chestnut leaves. The Allegheny chinkapin, chestnut oak, and beech trees are good examples to use. Then build up from those leaves to the one that is a "special artifact," the American chestnut. You can describe how these trees once covered the hillsides, that there are very few left, but we have a special one saved for today. If you are with an older child, you might label each drawing and look at the differences between species. Most children, however, will practice using a crayon to make their picture and move on.

At Shaver's Creek Environmental Center, we have used this station twice for festivals, where families are milling around. We built a tree trunk out of cardboard and posted it next to our booth. When kids finished their leaf rubbings, we invited them to staple their leaves on the tree and "help rebuild" the American chestnut. This helps to transform the abstract concepts — chestnut blight and the loss of a species — into something small, visually apparent, and collective. Start with a few leaves on the tree and ask kids to add their own.

We have also found that this activity is a great time to talk with the children's parents. While their kids are coloring, the parents may have questions about the trees, like: When are they coming back? Can I buy a chestnut for my yard? Have props ready from the Learning Box, and consider having two people to staff the booth-- one for children and one for parents.

Note: The American Chestnut Learning Box includes samples of the chinkapin, chestnut, and beech leaves. You can also collect your own and laminate them. We would recommend thinner lamination pages (3 mm) rather than the thicker pages (5 mm) for this.



Chestnut leaf rubbings give younger children an opportunity to learn about the American chestnut while creating art. Photo courtesy of Johanna Jackson