

Our forgotten Chestnut Tree

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During the last holiday season, I purchase several Chestnuts from a neighborhood grocery store. I transported them home and immediately placed them in a plastic Ziploc bag and deposited them in the refrigerator. These little guys must have been well hidden, since they escaped our detection until just recently. Almost one year later, we rediscovered our neglected seeds, and deemed it would be appropriate to plant them now. Several of the collected seeds were burgeoning with roots, thus demanding to be planted.

The progression of growing chestnuts is not challenging to learn. The routine merely encompasses germinating the seed, nurturing it in a suitable container, and finally transplanting it at the applicable time. Many nurseries have forgone marketing chestnut trees for several reasons. First, the trees have a low germination rate. My triumph with last year's overlooked seeds fail to collaborate this argument. Secondly, since they usually use a grafting process, they experience a high percentage of failures. Another drawback mentioned, which I do not need to concern myself with, involves grafting the plants. Lastly, they were alarmed with the profit margin. They maintain that it consumes

more in resources to grow the trees to a salable size than they will theoretically make. To me this is of no concern at all, as it causes me no distress, since the tree is for my own enjoyment, and not to earn a profit.

The foremost order of business is to primarily locate your chestnuts. It is customarily very grueling to find chestnuts at the supermarket, unless it is the Christmas holiday season. Once you have discovered a source for the nuts, select your chestnuts, choose only healthy-looking nuts with no defects. If they are starting to crack, chuck them into the trash, these will not germinate. Use only those chestnuts which will be likely to survive. Unfortunately, many chestnuts receive a hot water bath prior to being introduced to customers at the grocery store. This unsolicited bath tends to kill a chestnut seed, destroying its competence of germinating and growing. Sadly, you really will not know until you attempt to stratify them. Always procure twice the quantity of chestnuts which you propose growing due to the low germination rate. Now, you will need some moss. Lowe's sells bags of moss at very reasonable prices.

Place no more than 25 chestnuts in a single one-gallon Ziploc bag, along with the moss which you purchased. When acquired, the moss is ordinarily dry, so you will need to wet it. Place the moss into a small bucket of water and let it rest for five minutes. Remove the moss and squeeze any excess water from it, prior to placing it in the Ziploc bag. The stratification process is a long waiting period often involving 90 days or more. In my case it was a total of ten months.

After the stratification has been completed, fill several 1-gallon growing pots with loose potting soil. Only plant those chestnuts which clearly display signs of germinating. Place a single chestnut on the top of the soil near the center of the pot. Now, carefully space an additional five chestnut seeds 1 inch apart around the edge of the pot in somewhat of a circle. Apply 1 inch of soil on top of the chestnuts and compress the soil slightly with your hand. Place the pot in a small clear trash bag and secure the bag with wire ties. This keeps moisture within the bag.

Check the pot several times each week to see if any plants have emerged. When the seedlings break the soil, remove the bag completely. The new seedlings will require sunlight to grow. Place the pot in a location where it will get full sunlight. Leave the seedlings in the pot until there is no longer a fear of frost killing them. The seedlings will remain in these pots until May, when there is no further chance of frost, at which time they can be transplanted into the field.

When transplanting your chestnut seeds, you must locate an area where they will get plenty of sunlight and the soil is well drained. They do not enjoy clay or heavy soil, as they tend to die. They will flourish in partial shade; however, growth will be slower and the chestnut yield will decrease. If growing more than one tree do not place them closer than 25 feet next to the next tree. When transplanting the young trees, dig the hole twice the size of the container your seedling is in. You will need to water the transplanted seedling immediately. When fertilizing the plant, the common "Miracle Grow" works well.