

NEWS RELEASE
December 17, 2002

CHESTNUTS

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

By Gary W. Hickman, Horticulture Advisor
University of California Cooperative Extension, Mariposa County

After hearing a familiar old Christmas song, the idea of growing chestnuts came to mind. Although little research has been done on the chestnut in California, we do have a few suggestions, based on University of California leaflets. Chestnuts are monoecious (separate female and male flowers are borne on one plant – like walnuts) and some cultivars are self-unfruitful; thus, two different varieties should be grown for cross-pollination to produce consistent crops. Trees reach a height of 80 feet and spread to 60 feet under ideal conditions, and take from four to eight years to produce a nut crop. Chestnuts are excellent, fruitful, shade trees if grown in very well drained soil. Almost all varieties are pest free in California. No grafting is necessary as seedlings are the only known rootstock. Edible chestnuts should not be confused with the poisonous Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus californica*). Fresh chestnuts contain about 50% moisture. Unlike other nuts, chestnuts have low oil content (8%).

Site requirements: Optimum production in deep, alluvial, well-drained soils, pH 6.0-6.5. Warm growing season; some varieties tolerate lows below 0 F. Although most of our Mariposa soils do not meet these optimums, there are mature Chestnut trees in different parts of the county that appear to do well as garden trees.

Standard Varieties:

Colossal - large fruit, excellent quality.

Dunstan - medium size, blight resistant, late flowering.

Eurobella - large size, good pollenizer for Colossal

Silverleaf - medium sized, good pollenizer for Colossal.

Our local Mariposa nurseries can order these trees for those interested in planting.

Spacing: 25' x 25' (70 trees/acre); pollenizer row every fifth row

Irrigation: In dry areas, new trees need five to eight gallons of water per tree per week in driest months.

Training System: Open center or central leader (self-training)

Harvesting: Hand harvested off ground, ideally every two days during two-week

October drop. Prickly burrs still removed largely by hand.

The University of California prohibits discrimination against or harassment of any person employed by or seeking employment with the University on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or status as a covered veteran (special disabled veteran, Vietnam-era veteran or any other veteran who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized). University Policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Staff Personnel Services Director, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94607-5200, (510) 987-0096.