

Unit 2: The Giving Trees

A long time ago, when European settlers first arrived in North America it was said that a squirrel could travel from Georgia to Maine and never have to touch the ground by using the branches of the many American chestnut trees. These trees provided food, shelter, and materials for the plants, animals, and people who shared the forest. The American chestnut is what is called a keystone species, which means that many species and many lives depended on it for survival. Let's find out how the American chestnut served its communities!



The American Chestnut tree produces delicious, nutritious nuts after growing for at least 10 years! These nuts are gobbled up by wild turkeys, bears, deer, squirrels, and other wildlife. The nuts were also used to feed the cattle, pigs, goats, and turkeys of European settlers.



American Chestnut trees hosted 56 different kinds of moths including the now extinct American chestnut moth. There are also two species of chestnut

weevil: the lesser (smaller) chestnut weevil and the greater chestnut weevil. The last two greater chestnut weevils were found in 1986. The lesser chestnut weevil learned how to eat different kinds of tree nuts and was able to survive the near extinction of the American chestnut trees.



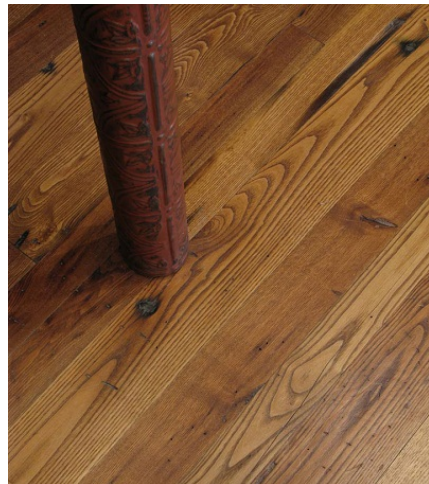
Different species of chestnuts have been eaten by cultures all over the world for thousands of years! The American chestnut was an important food source for the indigenous (native) tribes of eastern North America. These sweet brown nuts can be roasted, boiled, and even ground into flour for tasty treats like bread and pancakes! When European settlers arrived in North America they found the American chestnuts to be even sweeter and more delicious than the European chestnuts from their own lands.



The native peoples of eastern North America used American chestnut leaves as medicine. They could boil the leaves into tea to use for coughs, colds, and sore throats. The young leaves could also be used on the skin to treat burns, rashes, and even snake bites!



Chestnut leaves, seeds, and bark all contain something called tannic acid. Do you ever notice the color of the tea in your cup? That color comes from tannic acid in the tea leaves. Many plants contain tannic acid and are used to make dyes for fabric, yarn, leather, or paper. These skeins of yarn were dyed using American chestnut bark mixed with different plants, minerals, and chemicals by the American Chestnut Foundation.



American chestnut wood is very special. The mature trees grow straight and tall quickly making beautiful wood. The wood of the American chestnut was used to make everything from housing and fencing to furniture, musical instruments, and even cradles. Do you remember the tannic acid that helps to make dye? That tannic acid also helps keep the wood from rotting and American chestnut wood holds a lot of tannic acid. American chestnut wood was also used for firewood. It made very hot, long lasting fires that helped people survive the chilly winters of the north east.

Teacher's Bio:

Sonia Horowitz

Sonia is a homesteader, forager, and artist living in Mason, WI. She is passionate about inspiring families and individuals to safely and respectfully get out and explore the natural world. Along with online education, Sonia also enjoys live learning presentations from local walks and classes to conference lectures and workshops. This year she will be leading classes on ethnomycology at the Midwest Women's Herbal Conference Mycelium Mysteries event, the Georgia Mushroom Club, and the South Carolina Upstate Mycological Society.

Sonia's heart truly belongs to the forests of Lake Superior, but she is also heavily involved in leading women's empowerment groups and researching cultural history especially the history, mythology, and culture of her own ancestors, the Norse and Germanic peoples.

Sonia has a certification in the study of the Icelandic Sagas and is available to speak on topics of Norse culture and mythology as well as on the European witch crazes. It is Sonia's belief that the earth supports all people and by exploring our roots we can find good medicines for our own individual minds, bodies, and souls and learn more about how we can help support the earth in turn.

Her goals currently in progress are to transform her homestead (Amanita Acres) into a place of community and family learning. You can find Sonia at the Amanita Acres facebook page and at www.amanitaacres.com