

Ag and Agribusiness Institute

Should I Be Growing Chestnuts?

Tips for success

A unique nut

As Michigan growers look to diversify, chestnuts offer many attractive characteristics. Chestnut production requires relatively low pesticide inputs, nuts are harvested in October, and production inputs and equipment are similar to tree fruit production which growers may already be familiar with. The domestic chestnut industry is expanding and productive chestnut farms are being established around the state. Currently, it is believed that Michigan can market all the chestnuts it can grow, and more growers are needed to meet the demand.

Of course, the big question is how much money can you make growing chestnuts? That is still undecided, but one thing is certain, the chestnut industry is a young industry that requires flexibility and resourcefulness to take full advantage of the opportunities chestnut production has to offer.

History

In the 1980's and 90's, Chinese chestnut orchards began to dot the Michigan landscape. Unfortunately, many of these original orchards were abandoned because of low yields due to a lack of flowering and poor site selection.

In the 90's, Michigan State University researchers focused their efforts on grafted cultivars in an effort to improve on the inadequate returns of the Chinese chestnut. They focused on a variety called Colossal and used it as a standard to determine normal establishment, development and management strategies and also as a point of reference for evaluating other cultivars. This program has continued and grown over time with thousands of Colossal chestnut trees being planted in Michigan. Colossal has proven to be a highly productive chestnut cultivar in fruit-growing regions around the state, but is affected by severe winters, poor sites and spring frosts.



Considerations

- Careful site selection
- Grafted cultivars
- Controlling vertebrate pests
- Controlling weeds
- Irrigation
- Fertility management
- Sunscald prevention
- Pest control
- Harvesting capacity



Resources

Production info
chestnuts.msu.edu

MSUE News
msue.msu.edu

IPM Resources
ipm.msu.edu

Education
events.anr.msu.edu

Weather
enviroweather.
msu.edu

Extension
Erin Lizotte
taylo548@msu.edu

MSU Professor
Dr. Dennis Fulbright
fulbrig1@msu.edu

Requirements

Growers should carefully consider the site requirements and infrastructure necessary to produce chestnuts commercially.

Many factors determine the suitability of a site for chestnut production. A good, well-drained, relatively fertile soil is most desirable. Sandy-loam sites with high organic matter content are preferred, but good drainage is critical. Soils with substantial clay or organic matter that are poorly drained are not suitable for chestnut production. Remember that soil type, drainage, texture and organic matter content can vary significantly, even within a small area. Growers are encouraged to complete careful soil surveying prior to planting to help prevent problems over the lifespan of the orchard.

Chestnut orchards should only be established on well-drained soils where the pH is between 5.5 and 6.5. A lower pH can be tolerated, but below 4.5 burning of young shoots and leaves occurs. Higher pH levels will cause nutrient problems to develop. Sites with a pH above 7.0 exhibit the symptoms of leaf chlorosis and stunted growth.



Connect!

Consider joining a group that shares your interests. Chestnut groups that are active in Michigan include but are not limited to, the Midwest Nut Producers Council, the Michigan Nut Growers Association, Chestnut Growers of America, and the Northern Nut Growers Association.



[Rogers Reserve at Michigan State University](#)



[@Mlchestnuts](#)