



...But in North America, devotion centered on a tree that was never tamed, a wild forest king whose dominion sprawled over more than two hundred million acres. American chestnuts spread along the length of the eastern seaboard and west to Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee.* Legend has it that a squirrel could travel the chestnut canopy from Georgia to Maine without ever touching the ground. Along the way it would pass over at least 1,094 places with chestnut in their names. The chestnut was in many ways the quintessential American tree: adaptable, resilient, and fiercely competitive. Given the right conditions, no other hardwood could beat out the American chestnut in the race to the forest canopy...

...Unlike other nut-bearing trees, chestnuts are perennial and prodigious producers. (It's said that this predictability is the source of the expression "a chestnut" to mean an often-told tale.) Oaks, which shared the chestnut's forest niche, might offer a huge crop of acorns one year, then nothing the next. Because chestnuts are late bloomers, flowering beyond the reach of even the latest frost, the trees could be counted on for nuts every year, and lots of them: a single tree might bear as many as six thousand nuts. Such bounty supported an abundance of wildlife: bears, elk, deer, squirrels, raccoons, mice. The huge drives of wild turkeys that thrived in pre-Columbian Appalachia—estimated to be as many as ten million birds—feasted on the nuts, as did the enormous flocks of passenger pigeons that once blackened the skies in mass migrations...

The American Chestnut: The Life, Death and Rebirth of a Perfect Tree, Susan Freinkel, University of California Press, 2007

Related article in [Scientific American](#) which mentions the stand in West Salem, Wisconsin

