

[FIND A CHAPTER](#) ▼[WAYS TO GIVE](#) ▼[≡ Massachusetts / Rhode Island](#)

## THE PROJECT

[Learn More](#) ● ● ●

# Tree Identification

This is an example of an American chestnut tree reaching its branches out in the sun over Flint Pond in Lincoln. The long thread-like structures are male catkins, which are not yet showing anthers.



### Identifying Your Chestnut Tree – Step 1 of 2

The first step in deciding whether your tree is a possible chestnut is to distinguish it from other trees which can be mistaken for chestnut trees. The chestnut genus "*Castanea*" is not the same as the horsechestnut family "*Aesculus*" or the beech genus "*Fagus*".

In a second step, you need to learn the differences between the common members of the *Castanea* family. In Massachusetts, these are the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), the Chinese chestnut (*Castanea mollissima*), and the Japanese chestnut (*Castanea crenata*).



## Beech

If your tree looks like this, then it is probably a beech tree. These trees have toothed leaves, and smooth gray bark. They also have long pointed buds. The leaf is wider and shorter than the American chestnut tree leaves.



## Horsechestnut

If your tree has leaves like this, it is probably a horsechestnut tree. The leaves are “palmate”, radiating from the center, and are arranged in a spoke. The tree is often found planted in towns. It originated in Europe, and it is often what people think of when they hear about “chestnut” trees. It is in a separate family called “Aesculus”.

### Identifying Your Chestnut Tree – Step 2 of 2

Once you have decided that you have a Chestnut, the second step in deciding if your tree is American chestnut is to distinguish whether it is pure American, or if it has some non-American chestnut parentage.






Over the past hundred years or so, European, Chinese, and Japanese chestnut trees as well as hybrids have been planted in the natural range of American chestnut, so remote location is not necessarily a guide to a tree’s parentage.



### American Chestnut

If your tree has long toothed pendant leaves like this, it may be a member in the chestnut family. The American chestnut has long canoe shaped leaves with a prominent lance-shaped tip, with a coarse, forward hooked teeth at the edge of the leaf. The leaf is dull or “matte” rather than shiny or waxy in texture.

### Chestnut Family (*Castanea* species)

	Chinkapin	Japanese	Chinese	European	American	Hybrids
Picture						
Leaf taper to stem	straight	curved	curved	curved	straight	Be aware that all chestnuts can cross-pollinate, so that the chestnut you are trying to identify may actually be a mix of two or more different types of chestnuts, known as a hybrid.
Leaf taper to tip	straight	curved	curved	curved	straight	
Teeth	1-3 mm, small, sharp, no hook	tiny, often only bristles, no hook	large or small, not pronounced or hooked	big, sharp or rounded, no hook	6 mm, big, sharp, and often curved (hooked)	We can attempt to identify your chestnut, if you are unable to do so, by means of a leaf and twig sample.
Underside	sun leaves hairy	many large dots (glands), sun leaves hairy	sparse dots, sun leaves hairy	many small dots, sun leaves hairy on some specimens but not others	many small dots, sun leaves not hairy, long sparse hairs only on midrib	Please press one or two fresh leaves between cardboard with a 4-6 inch twig. Do not use plastic unless it is perforated or the leaves will mold. Crushed and bent leaves will not be in good enough condition to positively analyze.
Twig	hair tips, purple	pink to light red, large white lenticels	hairy tips, tan to pea green, large elliptical yellow lenticels	stout, dark brown, small white lenticels	slender, smooth, hairless, reddish brown, small white lenticels	Mail to: Kendra Collins New England Regional Science Coordinator Northern Research Station, US Forest Service 705 Spear Street South Burlington, VT 05403
Bud	3 mm, downy dark red, pointed, longer than wide, sticks out from stem	glossy brown, as long as it is wide (rounded)	hairy, tan, dull brown to black, rounded and flat against stem	dark red, fat and globular	long 6 mm, smooth, reddish brown, pointed or longer than it is wide, sticks out from stem	

	Chinkapin	Japanese	Chinese	European	American	Hybrids
Nut	1 nut,  1/2 tip pointed with a round cross section	2-3 nuts,  1-2 in.	2-3 nuts,  3/4-2 in.,  rounded hairy tip, sunburst pattern	2-3 nuts,  1-2 in.	2-3 nuts,  1/2-1 in.,  pointed tip, top 1/3-2/3 downy, sunburst at base	
Taste	sweet	not sweet	sweet	starchy	sweet	
Blight resistance	slight	moderate	high	slight	none	

Other chestnut identification sites to improve your eyes...

- [The American Chestnut Foundation identification pages](#)
- [USDA Plants Database](#)

## GET OUR NEWSLETTER

Your Email



BECOME A MEMBER

MAKE A DONATION



[BOARD LOGIN](#)

[SITEMAP](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[CHAPTER LOGIN](#)

TACF National Office  
50 North Merrimon Avenue,  
Suite 115, Asheville, NC 28804

Phone: 828-281-0047

Fax: 828-253-5373

[chestnut@acf.org](mailto:chestnut@acf.org)

© The American Chestnut Foundation

