



Chestnut Seed Planting Instructions

Updated 9/26/2022

Chestnut seed nuts need to be kept at high moisture levels. Try to harvest daily, in the morning. If humidity is high and/or temperatures are low, late afternoon harvest if also fine.

After harvesting, stratify seed nuts immediately. To do this, you need to mix them with a slightly damp (NOT WET!) medium such as peat moss, sawdust, or sand. If none of these are readily available, strips of slightly damp newspaper or paper towel will work, too. Mix nuts and medium at about a 50:50 ratio.



Place nuts in a Ziploc bag, or a plastic bag (unvented!) with a twist tie, then store the nuts in your refrigerator until spring. **DO NOT put chestnuts in your freezer.** That will kill them!

Chestnuts may begin sprouting as early as late January. Don't worry; just keep them in your refrigerator until about May 1. By then, some nuts may have roots sticking out of the seed as much as 2" to 3". This is normal.

About May 1, plant nuts in pots (with root pointing down) of 1 quart or larger size, using a light, porous growing medium such as a mix of peat and vermiculite or perlite. Cover nuts about 1" deep. You can mix your own, or pick up a "grower's mix" from a garden center. Do not use garden soil or "potting soil". It is too dense and heavy for potted plants.

Protect potted chestnut seedlings from mice, chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, and raccoons. Put pots where they get morning and afternoon sun, but mid-day shade. Keep growing medium moist, but not wet. Use collected rain water, not tap water or well water.

Around September 1st, you can plant the chestnut seedlings in their final location. Trees should be spaced about 20' apart. Do not plant them in a garden with the intention of digging them up and replanting them later. Chestnuts do not transplant well, this way. Protect seedlings from rabbits and deer using 5' tall tree shelters from Plantra www.plantra.com. Protect seedlings from weed competition, especially from grasses. Place a square of landscape fabric about 3' X 3' around each seedling, and put 2" of wood chips on top of the fabric. Do this in the first year. In subsequent years you can use the herbicide sulfometuron methyl ("Oust") in place of the fabric/mulch. Oust is a very low-cost alternative weed control, but needs to be applied by a qualified pesticide applicator. A professional consulting forester can be hired to do this if you are not certified to do this. Continue to provide protection from rabbits, deer, and weeds for at least 5 years, or until trees are well established.

An alternative to container growing is bed growing. To do this, build a box out of 2 X 12 lumber standing on edge. This will make a box with sides, but no top or bottom. If you think you might want to use this box more than one season you should use treated wood.

Box size will depend on how many seedlings you are trying to grow. You can grow 2 to 6 seedlings per square foot of bed space. If you have 100 seeds to plant, you will need between 16 and 50 square feet of bed space. A 4' X 4' box would give you 16 square feet, and a 4' X 12' box would give you just under 50 feet.

Fill the box with a light, porous growing medium as per the container growing instructions. To make your own mix, you can get 3.8 cu ft bales of peat from places like Lowe's, Menard's, Walmart, etc. You can get vermiculite attic insulation from Menard's, in 3 cu ft bags. Mix one 3.8 ft bale of peat with 1/3 bag of vermiculite. Mix in an 8 or 10 cu ft wheel barrow. Mix thoroughly, then add about a five gallon bucket of water, and mix thoroughly again. It would take 10 bales of peat and 3 bags of vermiculite for a 4' X 12' growing bed.

After the nuts are sprouted, plant them in the growing bed in rows 6" apart and anywhere from 4" to 12" apart within rows. Wider spacing takes more bed space, but allows the seedlings to grow bigger. Protect seed and seedlings from rodents and rabbits. You can leave the seedlings in the bed through the winter, but be sure rabbits can not get at them. When the bed thaws in the spring, you can lift the seedlings and plant them in their final locations. Again, be sure to protect the seedlings from deer, rabbits, and weeds (using landscape fabric and wood chip mulch) for the first five years.

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