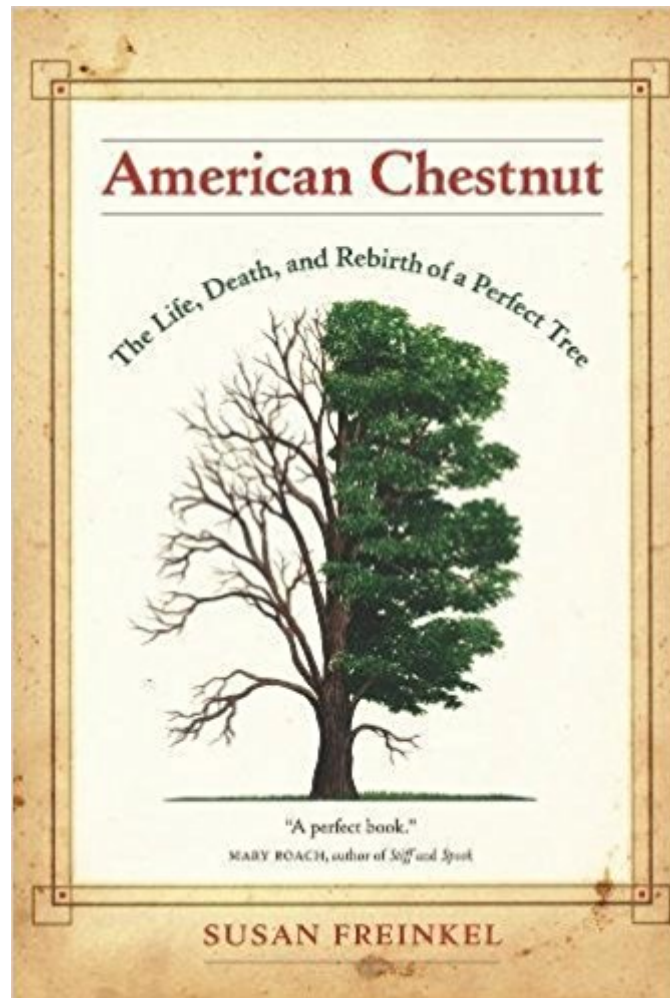


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American Chestnut: The Life, Death, And Rebirth Of A Perfect Tree



Synopsis

The American chestnut was one of America's most common, valued, and beloved trees—a "perfect tree" that ruled the forests from Georgia to Maine. But in the early twentieth century, an exotic plague swept through the chestnut forests with the force of a wildfire. Within forty years, the blight had killed close to four billion trees and left the species teetering on the brink of extinction. It was one of the worst ecological blows to North America since the Ice Age—and one most experts considered beyond repair. In *American Chestnut*, Susan Freinkel tells the dramatic story of the stubborn optimists who refused to let this cultural icon go. In a compelling weave of history, science, and personal observation, she relates their quest to save the tree through methods that ranged from classical plant breeding to cutting-edge gene technology. But the heart of her story is the cast of unconventional characters who have fought for the tree for a century, undeterred by setbacks or skeptics, and fueled by their dreams of restored forests and their powerful affinity for a fellow species.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: University of California Press (April 1, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520259947

ISBN-13: 978-0520259942

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 43 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #620,564 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #113 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Pets & Animal Care > Pet Loss #391 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Plants > Trees #1880 in Books > Science & Math > Environment > Environmentalism

Customer Reviews

In the first years of the 20th century, a mysterious blight began to infect the majestic American chestnut trees of the east. Thirty years later, as many as four billion had been felled by a virulent scourge from Asia, sweeping like a relentless wildfire through forests from Maine to Georgia. Freinkel's enthralling synthesis of science and sentiment chronicles the devastating impact of the chestnut tree's precipitous disappearance on generations of hardscrabble Appalachian homesteaders, who lost a flavorful nugget of nutrition that got their families through bitter winters,

and on flummoxed but determined botanists, who battled with politicians in the early 1900s about the best way to halt the blight's inexorable advance. As the presence of towering stands of the perfect tree faded into melancholic memory, she shows that resolute citizens and scientists have set out, with almost religious fervor, to resurrect the deadâ with signs of success. Detailed explanations of the science of crossbreeding, hypovirulence (fighting disease by infecting the infection) and genetic engineering often make for heavy if informative slogging. But time after time, this impassioned book strikes resonant emotional chords that transform dry facts into dynamic prose. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

â œA moving portrait. . . . Freinkelâ ™s fine reportage sparkles.â • (Natural History 2008-03-01)â œA tale of the functional extinction of what was once one of the most economically valuable and ecologically important trees.â • (American Scientist 2008-07-01)â œEngrossing and compelling.â • (American Studies Journal 2010-07-14)â œWill not disappoint!â • (Picayune Item 2011-02-16)â œHighly recommend it to anyone who cares about nature and perhaps this should be a required reading for all biology/ecology/environmental science students.â • (Wildlife Activist 2011-06-20)

American Chestnut by Susan Freinkel reads like a murder mystery novel that has merged with the six million dollar man tv show. Only this story about the chestnut tree is true and we aren't ever sure whether 'We can rebuild him.' We still aren't sure if 'We have the technology.' I enjoyed the book. I couldn't put it down in fact. But I confess to having a love affair with both trees and all things Appalachian. I do really wish the book had contained more than one photo and one diagram. I found myself constantly web surfing to find places, and photos of trees, discussed within the book. Also, I purchased the book in 2016 but the facts of the book seem to go no further than 2006. For a book that so despairingly confronts the reader with the limitations that time brings to the save-the-chestnut quest, I wish for at least a small epilogue explaining any breakthroughs that have come along since the book was first printed in 2009. If you love trees, I recommend you buy the book.

Somehow over the last 100 years the American public has come to believe that the oak tree is THE all American tree, THE symbol of strength and longevity. Well, this book reminds us of what the American public has forgotten, that the oak tree once had a big brother, a tree that grew faster, grew

taller, and lived longer. A tree that produced a wood as rot resistant as redwood, and every fall gave us very tasty and highly nutritious nuts. It was indeed as close to a perfect tree as you can imagine. This is a great book not only because it tells the tale of the American chestnut and its near demise so well, but also because it goes into great detail about the current restoration efforts and the often hidden "political" battles inside the major organization fighting to restore the chestnut, the American Chestnut Foundation.

...wonder no more. The epic saga of the demise of the American Chestnut is contained in this book. This incredibly well researched account traces the fall of the chestnut, and the saga of the people who have tried to revive the tree in the US, while pointing out why it is important. Having only completed 4 decades of life myself, I don't remember ever seeing a living chestnut tree. However, like many people, I heard tales of roasting chestnuts in Christmas carols, and remember my parents and grandparents talking about them. This book tells you why those people thought the trees were so important, and tells a tale so tragic it may just bring tears to your eyes. The book is well researched, but very readable, and very interesting. Strongly recommended for anyone interested in the impacts humans can unwittingly have on the environment around us.

In 2011, my wife and I moved to southern Indiana. We bought a house built in 1895 and set in on the restoration. I had hired several older Amish men to help with the work. One day they asked me if I knew what kind of trees were in my yard. They were referring to two trees that appeared to have been planted when the house was built. I told them I didn't know. They said they thought they knew every species of tree in the area but these two had them stumped. Later the same month, my sister-in-law who has worked as a biologist for the National Forest Service paid us a visit. I put the question to her and she was also stumped. Long story short, they turned out to be Chestnut trees. Samples were sent to the Indiana Chestnut Foundation and it turns out they are a hybrid. What puzzles them is the age and size. In addition, Purdue University is planning on working with some of the seeds. I said that to say this. In my excitement over the Chestnut I purchased several books on the subject. American Chestnut: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Perfect Tree is by far the best written, researched and passionate about the Chestnut. This book will appeal to a wide scope. At times it reads like a whodunit. In other places, it is excellent scientific writing and for those who love history, it is chock full of the historical role of the chestnut. I agree with several of the other reviewers that it should be required reading in school. It is a great example of how we can have a negative impact on nature with the most innocence intentions. I highly recommend this book. It is simply

great!Michael L. Gooch, Author of Wingtips with Spurs

Earlier this summer I bought the book and I'm glad I did. As a former science teacher and a lover of ecology this book was a great read. Much of what Freinkel wrote regarding the science, ethnobotany, & the epidemic was not new to me, but the human behind the scenes were. I found it intriguing how the various chestnut workers had differences of opinion and how this led to conflict - which was a bit sad. After all we are working together to combat a common enemy so we can learn from this for the sake of helping this and other species.

As a biologist with an intense avocational interest in the American Chestnut, I planted nearly a hundred seeds on my property in PA way back in 1972. After 8 years of beautiful growth, the blight hit them. I joined the American Chestnut Foundation and discovered a hypovirulent chestnut on my property that I shared with professionals studying the blight fungus. But my interest in chestnuts waned, in part because of the ACF's backcrossing program, until I read Susan Freinkel's marvelous book! The people I knew only as names became personalities--Burnham, Rutter, Hebard--and she introduced me to others, such as Gary and Lucille Griffen, whose work she described finally explained to me why the hypovirulent inoculants I applied to my chestnuts back in 1980 didn't help at all. It's the combination of genetic resistance with hypovirulence that is needed. What an eye opener and what a fantastic book she has written, one that has rekindled my youthful interest in restoring the role of the American Chestnut. Her book supports the huge role natural history plays in producing good science. Passion for a species is a natural element in knowing it.

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