

NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT ***Launches the 1,000 Chestnut Challenge***

**1,000 CHESTNUT CHALLENGE AIMS TO RETURN FUNCTIONALLY EXTINCT
AMERICAN CHESTNUT BACK TO NYC**



****PHOTOS HERE****

(Courtesy of New York Restoration Project)

For more information, please contact: Lauren Wilson: lwilson@nyrp.org

NEW YORK, NY – May 1, 2025 – [New York Restoration Project](#) (NYRP) is proud to partner with longtime American chestnut conservationist **Bart Chezar** and **The American Chestnut Foundation** to help distribute American chestnut saplings throughout the five boroughs. Called the **1,000 Chestnut Challenge** (nyrp.org/chestnut), the project's goal is to eventually establish 1,000 thriving American chestnut trees throughout our local urban tree canopy with the help of committed volunteers.

The American chestnut was one of the most abundant and productive trees in North America before the emergence of the chestnut blight: a fungal disease that kills the trees' inner bark, which can prevent the flow of nutrients and water to the leaves, flowers, and stems. Scientists estimate there were roughly four billion chestnut trees in the Eastern United States before the blight hit in the early twentieth century, making its disappearance a critical loss for regional forest ecosystems.

With the 1,000 Chestnut Challenge, NYRP seeks partner individuals and institutions to plant and monitor hybrid American chestnut seedlings as part of a long-term community science experiment. The different seeds have a range of resistance to the chestnut blight, and the monitoring data we collect will help identify resistant trees to collect seeds from in the future. This data will also help inform larger restoration efforts lead by The American Chestnut Foundation. **(cont'd)**

Requirements to receive a tree include:

- **A planting site in New York City capable of hosting a large tree.** While selected recipients will receive a small sapling to plant, the goal is for it to grow into a large tree over time.
Note: Recipients must have permission to plant at their chosen site.
- **A commitment to tree care** during the first few years after planting, including any necessary weeding and occasional watering.
- **An annual commitment to complete a brief survey on the health and size of the tree.** NYRP will provide specific instructions on what and how to measure the tree once per year.

Interested volunteers can learn more and complete a registration form at nyrp.org/chestnut.

The return of the American chestnut to New York City is a deeply collaborative effort, and we are grateful for the invaluable partnership of **NYC Parks, The American Chestnut Foundation, Bart Chezar, Green-Wood Cemetery**, and the **Prospect Park Alliance**.

In addition to the 1,000 Chestnut Challenge, NYRP has planted more than 300 hybrid American chestnut trees in Northern Manhattan's Highbridge Park in partnership with NYC Parks and The American Chestnut Foundation. The endeavor is the largest urban experiment of its kind and part of the larger movement to help restore the American chestnut to its historic range.

NYRP is also partnered with NYC Parks in 2007 to launch the historic MillionTreesNYC initiative. MillionTreesNYC became a citywide movement, and the millionth tree was planted in October 2015 in the South Bronx. Today, NYRP continues populating the New York City tree canopy with its popular free tree giveaways, which distribute 3,500 free trees throughout all five boroughs every spring. NYRP's free tree giveaway program has distributed more than 75,000 trees throughout New York City.

QUOTES

"New York Restoration Project is proud to help lead the American chestnut's return to New York City," said **New York Restoration Project Executive Director Lynn Bodnar Kelly**. "In partnership with NYC Parks and The American Chestnut Foundation, NYRP has planted more than 300 hybrid American chestnut trees in Northern Manhattan's Highbridge Park. The endeavor is the largest urban experiment of its kind, and the 1,000 Chestnut Challenge will help further this meaningful effort."

"In this time of staggering biodiversity loss and growing threats to the forests of the Eastern United States, the opportunity to bring the functionally extinct American chestnut to New York City is extremely important and gratifying," said **Jason Smith, NYRP Director of Northern Manhattan Parks**. "We are grateful for the strong partnerships and dedicated volunteers who will help strengthen our local tree canopy."

"I am excited about this kick-off to the 1,000 Chestnut Challenge," said longtime conservationist **Bart Chezar**. "As significant as this giveaway is, educating everyone about how important chestnuts and all trees are to New York City, but also how it fits into the overarching 'challenge' of climate change, is our real purpose."

"We are proud to help return the iconic American chestnut to its rightful place in the green spaces of New York City," said **The American Chestnut Foundation Interim CEO & President Bruce Levine**.

(cont'd)

ABOUT NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT

New York Restoration Project (NYRP) is a 30-year-old non-profit organization driven by the conviction that all New Yorkers deserve access to high-quality public green space. Since our founding in 1995 by Bette Midler, NYRP has worked collaboratively with residents in communities across the five boroughs to renovate gardens, restore parks, plant trees, promote urban agriculture, and build partnerships that transform the city's landscape. We are committed to creating a greener, more resilient city for all.

****PHOTOS HERE****

(Courtesy of New York Restoration Project)

For more information, please contact:

Lauren Wilson: lwilson@nyrp.org