· It's unlikely those roasting chestnuts are home-grown

By SUSAN LOTH al Geographic News

Any chestnusts roasting on open American fires this winter are probably European imports. That's the way it's been since a killer fuigus introduced in this country about the turn of the century virtually wiped out the American chestnut tree. Yet many old chestnut roots keep sending up new sprouts — only to be knocked back down by fungus. And although the chestnut enemies are multiplying, researchers keep looking for ways to bring back the tree. The American chestnut, Castanea dentact, was once a 100-foot monarch of the Eastern hardwood forests. Its straight and rot-resistant timber was good for furniture, fenes, and poots. From its bark came tannin for leathermaking, and its nuts were relished by animals and people.

But the American chestnut was no match for Endothio parastica, a stowaway fungus that arrived in New York on a shipment of Oriental chestnut trees. Entering the tree through a break in the bark, the fungus gradually encircles and strangles it. The blight spread quickly and by 1950 had devastated most of the country's American chestnuts, an estimated 9 million acres.

Some researchers are trying to develop a more hight-resistant-heatont, one with the fungs to the team of the team

WORK ON HYBRIDS has another drawback, she said: "You're not going to reforest the woods with hy-brids because they do not propagate

going to referest the woods with hybrids because they do not propagate well.

"At CAES, it has seemed to us that since there are all those roots out there sprouting, the chestnut would come back all by itself if there was some way to bring the fungus a little bit under control."

In Italy's chestnut orchards, scientists found a natural cure weaker strains of the fungus, called hypovirulent or H strains, which are lected with viral type agents. The H strains moved into blight-stricken European chestnuts and debilitated the killer fungus.

The H strains will also cure cankers on American chestnuts—but spreaded into the tree. The cure won't spread by itself, and scientists don't know shy.

Another problem Ms. Anagnostakis has found, is that the fungus has diversified into dozens of strains, so that not every H strain blocks every killer strain. In response CAES scientists have experi-

for monarch of the Eastern hardwood forests. Its straight and rot-resistant timber was good for furniture, fences, and posts. From its bark came tannin for leathermaking, and its nuts were relished by animals and people. But it was no match for Endothia parasilice, a stowaway fungus that ar-rived in New York on a shipment of Oriental chestnut trees. . . The blight spread quickly and by 1950 had devastated most of the country's American chestnuts, an estimat-

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in their inoculations.

In the last few years, Congress has earmarked \$300,000 for research in chestnut fungus H strains, according to Clay Smith of the U.S. Forest Service, which administers the grants.

the grants.

The government also has its eye on another tree foe, the chestnut gall-wasp.

LIKE THE FUNGUS, the gall-wasp probably hitchhiked in from the Orient. Dr. Herry A. Payne, an entomologist with the U.S. Depart-

ment of Agriculture, discovered it in 1974 in a Georgia grove of Chinese

1974 in a Georgia grove of Chinese chestmuts.

The insect lay its eggs in the growing tips of chestmuts in July and Angust, and the irritated plant produces a growth called a gall. The larva winters and develops in the gall, then eats its way out in spring. "It kills the shoot or limb it's on, and severe infestations will kill the tree." Payne said. "The gall-wasp is moving about 15 miles a year. It's now in at least 10 counties in central Georgia." The state has lost about Georgia." The state has lost about half of its commercial Chinese

chestnuts — 150 acres.

Will the gall-wasp move farther north? "We have no idea," said Payne. "But the history of epidemics of new, exotic insects is they tend to spread wherever the host is." Hosts include American, Japa-

tend to spread wherever the host is." Hosts include American, Japanese, and Chinese chestnuts. Chinese chestnuts have become popular yard trees. Payne advises homeowners with gail-ways to remove the gails and destroy them. And after two years of experiments the gail pays to remove the gails and destroy them. And after two years of experiments that gail the gail pays to break buds in autumn, exposing the insect at the wrong time of the year. "It's a new method of insect control." he said. "I'm using the tree to manipulate the insect."

With all those enemies — insect and fungus — is it worth trying to save the chestnut?

Citing its timber quality, Ms. Anagoostakis said, "I thin its commercial value could be quickly restabilished."

And recalling that American im-port up to 10 million pounds of chestnuts a year, Payne said, "There's still a demand for them."



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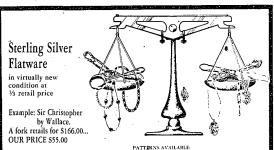
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