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**The Green Thumb**  
By GEORGE ABRAHAM

American Chestnuts: Some say that the American chestnut, like a ghost out of the past, is making a comeback. Is that true? If you're of retirement age you probably remember the American chestnut trees being wiped out by the blight fungus about 1915 or so.

These trees died off from one of the worst plant diseases in history, but strangely sprouts have persisted from the old roots. Some of these sprouts have been attacked and killed by the blight, usually before fruiting age. The blight does not kill the roots. Some of these trees are 30 feet tall, and are bearing chestnuts.

Are these trees immune to the dreaded disease? Because they have escaped the blight it's no assurance they are immune.

A nurseryman friend of mine, R. W. Daubendiek of Harpers' Ferry, Iowa, has second-generation trees which are 30 years old, and which show no sign of blight. In addition, he has about five acres planted with about 20,000 third generation American chestnut seedlings which he is hopeful will be free from the disease.

He makes no claim trees grown from his seed will be disease-resistant, but he's hopeful. The most distinguishing feature about the American chestnut is the sweetness of its nuts. Some of the other chestnuts must be boiled or roasted to remove their bitter taste. The American chestnut can be eaten raw, as they come from the hull.

If you can't get the American chestnut you can have chestnuts from Chinese or hybrid chestnut trees that produce nuts of equal flavor and larger size. These are grafted trees of selected varieties that are highly resistant to the blight.

**SPINDLY tomatoes:** If you started your own tomato plants from seed indoors, and find that the plants are tall and spindly, you have two choices: Pinch the tips back and let them bush out, or start some plants again.

Normally you allow about six weeks from the time you sow the seed to transplanting time, so gauge accordingly. And while you're at it, how about starting some herbs this year? Parsley is the most popular, but don't overlook basil, chives, dill, marjoram, oregano, sage and thyme.

**FREE:** Send me a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of my illustrated booklet, "Gardening Tips for Vegetables."

**GREEN THUMB CLINIC:** A reader writes: "I kept our geraniums in a tub in the cellar. They are tall and spindly. Should I cut them back?"

**Answer:** Yes, cut them back to within three or four inches of the pot. Keep them in a bright window, well watered. A liquid feeding every two or three weeks will help green them up.

**Lacking Space? Try 'Espalier'**

Lack of space need not be a problem in growing fruit trees, according to Dr. Robert Carlson, Michigan State University horticulturist.

Branches of young, supple fruit trees can be trained to grow flat against a wall or garage. This method of training fruit trees is called the "espalier," and most common is the "candelabra system," says Carlson.

The branches are trained on horizontal wires, starting a foot and a half from the ground and spaced a foot apart to the top of the wall. Opposite pairs of branches are chosen for each wire, and they are grown along the wire to the outer horizontal limits; then they are allowed to grow upward. This creates a "U" inside a "U."

When training the branches, use soft string, rubber budding bands or other soft material. Don't use wire; it can cause girdling and eventual death of a limb.

"If you have limited space, but a sunny wall," says Carlson, "try an espalier."

**Trees Cool**

Young growing trees cool and moisten the summer air — up to the equal of 10 room air conditioners for a single tree.

# Strawberry Barrel Is Ornamental Novelty

What do you get when you fill an old barrel with soil, broken flower pots, and strawberry plants? A strawberry barrel, of course! The strawberry barrel is an interesting and ornamental novelty for the gardener," says Jerome Hull Jr., horticulturist at Michigan State University.

He suggests using an old wooden barrel, avoiding those that have been used for vinegar or dill pickles. Wash the barrel thoroughly before starting.

Holes, about an inch in diameter, should be located eight inches apart and staggered in adjacent rows. Make the first row five inches below the top of the barrel.

Bore five or six holes, one inch in diameter, in the bottom of the barrel to allow for drainage.

Ideally, the barrel should be on a wooden platform with casters to allow turning so all plants can enjoy some sun. A base of bricks would be an acceptable alternative.

PLACE A two-inch layer of pebbles, coarse gravel, or broken flower pots in the bottom of the barrel. Then fill the barrel with loam or sandy loam soil to the bottom row of holes. Pack firmly.

Insert the plants into the lowest row of holes, roots first, so that the plant crowns are even with the surface of the barrel. Place only one plant in each hole. Spread the roots out well and cover with soil.

Continue to do the same for each row of holes.

Finally, set six or eight plants in the top of the barrel.

WHEN THE barrel is one-third full of soil, place in the center of the barrel a three- or four-inch lid, metal pipe, or wooden channel long enough to extend up even with the surface. This tube should contain enough perforations to allow circulation of both air and water.

When planting is finished, thoroughly moisten the soil by running a hose into the open center or tube, filling it with water. Do this often enough to keep the soil fairly moist but not waterlogged.

Add a small amount of a complete fertilizer once every two or three weeks with the watering. Discontinue applications about Sept. 1.

Move the barrel into a building for winter protection and cover it with several inches of straw.

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## Now Is Time To Prune Roses

**EAST LANSING** Pruning your bush roses now will probably give you more blooms than if you pruned last fall, say horticulturists at Michigan State University.

Roses should be pruned annually to improve their appearance, remove dead wood, and control the quantity and quality of flowers produced by the plants.


Pruning is not difficult. Use sharp tools. A fine-toothed saw is useful for cutting dead canes, while all other pruning should be done with pruning shears.

Do not leave bare stubs when pruning. Make all cuts on a cane, to the point on the crown from which the pruned member originated, or to a strong outward-facing bud.

**FIRST,** remove all winter damaged canes and those affected by insects and diseases from the previous year. If there are no live buds, remove the whole branch or cane.


**Next,** remove canes that are rubbing or crossing another, those that are growing toward the center of the bush, and those that are smaller than the diameter of a pencil.

Finally, shape the plant by cutting the strong canes to a uniform height — about 24 to 30 inches in southern Michigan.



**RESISTANCE** to the two common tomato diseases, verticillium and fusarium rots is now being bred into hybrid tomatoes. This one is named for its resistance to both — VF. A main crop tomato, it has medium-size fruits, lots of them.

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