

Chestnut Inoculation Clinic- A Milestone for ThorpeWood Orchard

-Robert Strasser and Kathy Marmot
Maryland Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation

ThorpeWood volunteers and staff participated in a Chestnut Inoculation Clinic June 8th that takes the most advanced trees in ThorpeWood's American chestnut orchard to the next level of the American Chestnut Foundation's backcross breeding program. Guided by Sara Fitzsimmons, Tree Breeding Program Coordinator for The American Chestnut Foundation, and Robert Strasser, Hood College American Chestnut Research Associate, participants followed rigorous procedures to inoculate 132 of the more than 300 trees in ThorpeWood's six-year-old orchard with the blight fungus that devastated this once dominant Appalachian tree early in the 20th Century.

The four-hour inoculation clinic provided hands on learning about ThorpeWoods' role in The American Chestnut Foundation effort to restore the American chestnut to our Eastern forests by breeding trees that incorporate blight resistance from Chinese chestnuts. The inoculated trees are the most advanced trees in this breeding program and are more than 90% American. Inoculation is the process of infecting trees with the blight in order to see how much resistance they have inherited from their parents. Trees that demonstrate good disease resistance will become parents of the next generation in the backcross breeding program. The inoculated trees will undergo a final evaluation in the Spring of 2007, when the best will be selected for further breeding here in Maryland and neighboring states.

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