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What's the Story with... ...the Funny Looking Garden of Chestnut Trees?

By [Fay Abrahamsson](#)**SHORE VIDEO**
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The whimsical bright blue plastic sleeves in a garden in town will hopefully make a difference in the history of the American chestnut tree, as part of an experiment by the American Chestnut Foundation and the Conservation Commission. In the first half of the 20th century, blight blew its way into the U.S. and wiped out all the chestnut trees. According to Town Tree Warden and Environmental Planner Leslie Kane, tiny growths still sprout from dead stumps, but only live a few years and die before they can produce seeds. Last year, the American Chestnut Foundation approached the town with a request: to use a section of a former community garden at Nut Plains Park to bring back healthy chestnut trees. Using genetics and plant pathology, a special breeding program would mate Chinese chestnuts that are disease-free and blight-resistant with native Connecticut saplings. Last year, a group volunteered and planted a test orchard of 20 plants at the park. The ground was prepared first by filling it with a mixture of peat moss, water, and forest soil containing mycorrhizae (a fungal root network that many trees are dependent on). A hybrid chestnut was carefully planted in each hole and protected from voles and deer with a blue tree shelter. The initial planting turned out to be a success, according to Conservation Commission site coordinator Jennifer Allcock. "On that basis we are proceeding with the planting of 125 trees per year," she said. At its Jan. 22 meeting, the Board of Selectmen approved Phase II of the orchard agreement with the foundation, in which the Conservation Commission will maintain the space. The total budget for the project is estimated at \$8,700, said Allcock, of which \$2,000 is coming from the Conservation Commission's budget; \$2,000 from The Guilford Foundation, Inc. Betty Stevens Tree Fund; and the remainder, \$4,700, from the American Chestnut Foundation. The town will provide in-kind services from its Department of Public Works (hauling dirt and fertilizer) and Parks & Recreation Department (mowing). Bishop's Orchards will plow and plant, said Allcock. In early April, the commission needs 20 volunteers to help erect a seven-foot deer fence. To volunteer, call Jennifer Allcock at 203-453-5041.