

GARDENING THE DICKSON WAY



"Chestnut Trees" by GT.PHOTOS is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0



Mentors

by Joann Hayes Anderson

Stop for a minute and think about people who encouraged you at various times of your life. Who was willing to share his or her skills, positive attitude, listened to you, and inspired you to be who you are today?

Recently losing my “go to” person regarding some plants, and the history of the north western area of Dickson County, has already left me with no answer to a question or two. My Mother kept her amazing recall of the past for almost all of her ninety-eight years, and she could tell you who had lived where and everything about the culture of the area for the last hundred years. Her knowledge, personal interest, and enthusiasm were so help-

ful to me with my passions for family history and native plants. When I think about the importance of mentors throughout my life, I think of her first. I’m grateful that she allowed me to be independent, inquisitive, and spend so much time among the wildflowers, because there was so much work to be done in a huge farming family.

Mother remembered the two huge chestnut trees near her childhood home, on the Childress Branch of Yellow Creek, and she would sometimes mention them when trees were the discussion topic. I once asked if they sold chestnuts as a cash crop, and she said, “Of course not, we ate them”. She sadly remembered

their efforts to save the trees, but the trees died from the blight that had finally made its’ way here. The blight was introduced by Asian chestnut trees that were planted in Brooklyn in 1904. The American Chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, was important to the economy of the eastern United States. Trees easily grew to ten feet in diameter, over one hundred feet high, and dominated forests. The wood was light but strong and long lasting. Losing the most prolific forest tree was devastating to the lumber industry, and the nuts were an important food source for humans and animals. The chestnut lumber from old barns and other buildings is valuable today as reclaimed wood.



Another of her favorite trees was the weedy, invasive, boxelder, *Acer negundo*. I reminded her that it has a bug named after it (boxelder bug), produces suckers and reseeds everywhere! Can you tell I'm opposed to planting one even if it is a native tree? Apparently, it reminded her of childhood, and she just loved her boxelder tree. Wood-turners love the heartwood that often has red or pink streaks and makes beautiful vases and bowls. There are cultivars on the market for those who want this

tree in the landscape.

A third plant that Mother loved from childhood was the hardy, Chestnut Burr Rose. It has fragrant, pink blooms described as cabbage roses, and they are very fragrant. The large rose hips remain on the rose bush after the long blooming period each summer. Our family would like to thank the many friends and relatives who supported us during the past weeks with words of kindness and hope, flowers, food, cards, and visits. We

appreciate, and are grateful to, all the staff at Tristar Horizon, Caris Hospice, NHC Nursing Home, Spann Funeral Home, and to Donna and Steve for feeding masses of friends and relatives.

I was reminded this morning of my Mother's love for azaleas when I discovered a lone, large, white and coral bloom on an azalea bush that had never before had a late bloom.

Happy Gardening



Gardening Partners is a non-profit founded in 2003 to serve Dickson County with gardening education and advice.

Readers may submit gardening questions by email: gpdc471@gmail.com, on the website:

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