NYNGA English Walnut Project – Tree Distribution Program

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The NYNGA seeks committed individuals who are willing to plant, care for and help evaluate English walnut (EW) trees throughout NYS and the greater Northeast region. It may take six years or longer for a seedling EW tree to start producing nuts and the majority of the trees we are distributing have unknown adaptation and production characteristics – they are strictly experimental. We do our best to select seed or scion wood from superior trees to help increase the chances that trees we distribute have a better than average chance of turning out to be exceptional in at least some aspects of adaptation and/or production.

When choosing a planting site it is best to stay at least 50-feet away from any nearby trees to reduce squirrel depredation in the nut orchard. For best results trees should be planted on well-drained or moderately well-drained soils, watered until well established, protected from deer and rodents using either tree tubes or wire mesh exclosures, and kept relatively weed free through hand weeding or other means. In plantings meant strictly for short-term evaluation trees can be planted as closely as in a 15x15-foot grid. If planting an orchard space the trees on a 40x40-foot grid.

Some of the trees distributed by NYNGA will not turn out to be well adapted to our NYS climate and/or won't have desirable production characteristics – these trees in due course should be culled and replaced. From trees that turn out to well adapted and excellent producers we would eventually like to collect scion wood so that the trees can be cloned. The only way to identify superior trees is to grow out seedlings and promising clones at numerous locations throughout NYS and evaluate tree health and nut characteristics for at least 3 full years of nut production.

Walnut breeders around the world are looking for late leafing/late flowering individuals as this characteristic helps trees escape the damaging effects of late spring frosts. Superior trees are winter hardy and the best ones will not wake up when warm weather returns in winter or spring before its time. Desirable trees will also have natural resistance to walnut blight which is a challenging disease in wet, humid climates. Of course we are looking for trees that produce a good crop of nuts that fall free from the husk most years, crack out easily and taste good with no bitter aftertaste. There are most likely many not widely known superior trees growing in northeastern North America and we would like to find and conserve the genetic diversity those trees represent.

Seed intended for planting needs to be cold stratified over winter. Place the seed in moist moss, peat moss, vermiculite or similar material and place in an unheated location wherein the temperature remains above freezing. The seed can be planted in pots and grown out for a year in a rodent protected cage or planted directly in the ground and protected from rodents. Plant about 1 to 1.5-inches deep with the nut laying on its side with the suture up and down. For direct planting one can make a cylinder of half inch wire mesh approximately 6-inches in diameter and 18 to 24-inches tall with a cover over the open top. Plant a walnut where you wish, place the wire mesh cylinder over the planted nut and around 1-inch into the soil and keep it firm to the ground by tying it to a stake placed on the outside of the cylinder.

The EW Project is not without costs associated with growing and distributing trees such as collection of seed or scion wood, pots, potting mix, protection from deer/rodents, and the purchase of grafted cultivars from various sources. If you would like to support the project with a financial donation please make a check out to NYNGA and write EW Project on the check. Send checks to: Jim Darling, NYNGA Treasurer, 1300 Spring Street Extension, Groton, NY 13073.

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