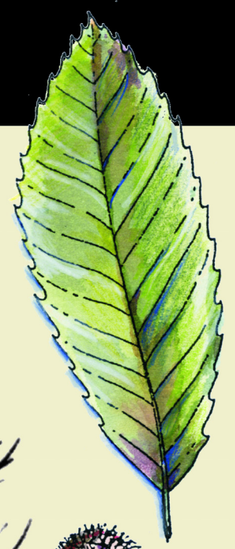
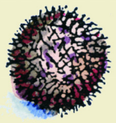
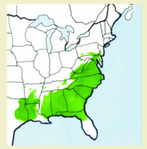
The Story of Chinquapin

What is a Chinquapin?

The Eastern or Allegheny Chinkapin (*Castanea pumila*), also spelled "Chinquapin," is a small native tree that produces large numbers of acorn-like nuts encased in prickly husks, much like the American Chestnut.







Chinquapin trees range from the southeast to the Mid-Atlantic United States.

Chinquapins in 16th Century Virginia

Chinquapin trees and nuts were recorded by the earliest Europeans in Virginia William Strachey, the Secretary for the Jamestown Colony in 1610, wrote that Native Americans in the Virginia colony ate, *"acorns, walnuts, chestnuts, chechinquamins, and fish . . . "*

Captain John Smith. observed, *"They have small fruit growing on little trees, husked like a Chestnut, but the fruit most like a very small Acorne. This they call Chechinquamin, which they esteeme a great daintie . . . Of their Chestnuts and Chechinquamins boyled, they make both a broath and bread for their chiefe men, or at their greatest feasts."*

Native Americans in the southeast were observed in the 16th century eating a variety of foods by hand while sitting on mats with large wooden platters. This 16th century engraving by Theodor De Bry depicts some of the foods which were also common in Virginia, including nuts, maize, fish, and shellfish.

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Chinquapins in 20th Century Virginia

The Chinquapin trees and their nuts growing in the area now called Forest Park and Chinquapin Park were well known to people living near here.

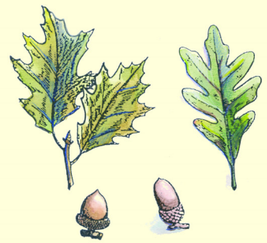
Elizabeth Henry Douglas remembered, *"All in the back of that field . . .And all through here, Chinquapin [Park], there were strawberries, wild blackberries, dewberries. . . We picked them . . . and those chinquapin [nuts]. When they came in October, and there they were in that little sticky part, you would know that they were getting ready to get ripe. . . You would see the pod open up and inside sat that little nut, the smallest nut you've ever seen, but delicious. . ."*

Look for these nuts along the trail . . .

Beechnut

Hazelnut

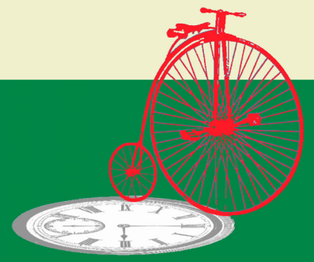
Hickory Nut



Acorn (Red Oak and White Oak)

Black Walnut

Alexandria's oak-hickory forests, such as in this park, produce large quantities of hickory nuts, hazelnuts, acorns, walnuts, and beechnuts annually. Nuts and acorns are an important food resource for local wildlife. During times of plenty, Blue Jays and Gray Squirrels bury uneaten acorns and nuts for future consumption. Those not retrieved grow into new trees, ensuring the continued survival of oak-hickory forests along with the wildlife they support.



Alexandria Heritage Trail

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