



Rideau Valley Conservation Authority

# Butternut Recovery Program



**B**utternut canker disease has infected most of the butternut trees across the entire North American range. This fungal disease has been found on more than 99 percent of the butternut trees in eastern Ontario. There is no known cure for butternut canker disease, but some trees may be resistant to the disease just as some elm trees are proving more resistant than others to Dutch Elm Disease.



Rideau Valley Conservation Authority is working with the Forest Gene Conservation Association and the Ontario Butternut Recovery Team to build a strong butternut recovery program across southern Ontario. With the help of numerous partners including the Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, the Ontario Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Ferguson Forest Center, Stewardship Councils and Conservation Authorities, and most importantly local landowners, RVCA is locating healthy mature butternuts and planting vigorous butternut seedlings through a regional Butternut Recovery Program. Landowners are reporting butternut trees found in their backyards, fence lines and woodlots. Conservation Authority staff then assess each tree for overall health and potential canker resistance. If the

tree is healthy and has minimal to no canker infection, it is added to a database and mapped for future seed collection. Thousands of seeds are collected each year from healthy parent trees to produce 2,000 vigorous seedlings that are in turn planted throughout eastern Ontario to replace the dead and dying butternut. Over 11,000 butternut seedlings have been planted since 2006. As many seeds as possible are collected from the healthiest trees in the hope that what resistance may exist, will be passed on to the seedling. These healthier trees are assessed each year to determine their disease tolerant status.

So far, 464 healthy trees have been found and recorded as potential seed sources for future seed collection. Forty-five of these trees show signs of possible resistance to the canker disease. Leaf samples from these trees have been sent for DNA testing to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Ontario Forest Research Institute to determine how many are hybrids or pure butternut species trees. Test results indicate that about 90 percent are pure butternut. A program is underway to save the genetics of these possibly resistant trees through a long-term grafting program.





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## The butternut Recovery Program is working to:

- Inform and educate landowners about butternut canker.
- Locate, assess and map mature healthy butternut trees with landowner help.
- Collect seeds from healthy parent trees and grow vigorous seedlings to replace butternut loss.
- Plant and monitor butternut seedlings on public and private sites throughout eastern Ontario.
- Assess the status of the healthiest trees every year.
- Collect scions from the healthiest pure butternut to graft for disease resistance screening.
- Work closely with the national and provincial Butternut Recovery Teams and other recovery efforts across Ontario.

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