



Reforested Iceland

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When Iceland was settled over 1100 years ago it boasted extensive forests of birch trees, covering about 30% of the area. The settlers were agriculturalists so they cleared the land for grazing land for sheep, cattle and horses. They used the lumber for building. At one point the forests had virtually disappeared. Now the amount of forest in Iceland has crept up to 1.4% of its land area. The Iceland Forest Service has a program of reforestation , and hopes to double the size of the forest over the next forty years.

The only tree that managed naturally to reach Iceland was the Downy Birch, a variety that also grows in Ireland, Scotland and Northern Europe. But this tree grows very slowly and reaches a height of not more than 15 meters. Icelanders have scoured the world to locate faster growing trees that might thrive in their unusual climate of short, cool summers and long mild winters. Sitka Spruce and Engelmann Spruce both native to B.C. and Alberta seem to do well.

At the suggestion of a U.S. consultant the Iceland Forest Service is going to try the chestnut tree. Chestnut trees are to be grown from seeds supplied by Ontario's Grand River Conservation Authority. The assumption is that seeds developed to tolerate the Ontario winter should stand a good chance in Iceland.