

# Horsechestnut

## *Aesculus hippocastanum*

The Horsechestnut has been carried by man from its original home in Greece over a considerable part of the world. Turks purportedly used the nuts to concoct a remedy to cure cough in horses. But my theory is that the shucked nuts look suspiciously like horse hockey. These nuts are high in starch, but contain an alkaloid making them inedible for humans. Horsechestnut can grow to 100 feet, but is more often about 75 feet with a spread of 40-50 feet. It is a sturdy and rapidly growing tree and is quite landscape and urban tolerant. Long lived, but it is often disfigured by leaf blotch disease. The very large leaves and bounteous crops of nuts cause a fair amount of litter in the landscape, but this nuisance is offset by the grand form, dense shade, and interesting, exfoliating bark. The Horsechestnut has now been planted across the contiguous US.



### Identification

#### Leaves

Deciduous, opposite, palmately compound leaf with 5-7, obovate, serrate leaflets 4-6" long arranged in a fanlike form. Long petioles.



#### Bark/Wood

Light to dark brownish gray. Develops irregular, scaly, rough ridges with maturity. Bark breaks up into thin plates which peel off slowly. Large leaf scars.



#### Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; showy white flowers in upright clusters, 5-8" long in May. 1-3 fruits, shiny brown, 1-2", are encased in a spiny, green husk that turns brown.



#### Form

Upright, generally to 60 feet with a round or oblong crown. Dense, symmetrical crown with a smooth outline. Strong central leader. No surface roots.



#### Uses

Quite tolerant of city/suburban conditions and used broadly as a landscape and park tree.

#### Ethnobotany

Old world concoction for use as a remedy for coughs in horses.

#### Native Distribution

Greece.

#### Establishment

Easily transplanted or grown from seed. Prefers sunny exposure sheltered from wind.

### Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 100'Hx60'Wx4'dbh  
 USDA Zone 4-7  
 Light Requirements Full Sun

Soils  
 Drought Tolerant?  
 Inundation Tolerant?

Diverse

Moderate

No

#### Pests/Damaging Agents

Leaf blotch, leaf scorch, and leaf spot disease all will turn leaves brown. Rake and destroy fallen leaves. Powdery mildew often coats the underside of leaves with white mold.

#### Similar Species

Ohio Buckeye

Horsechestnut buds are sticky and resinous. Commonly 7 leaflets. Buckeye buds are not resinous and commonly have 5 leaflets.

#### Propagation

Seed - dormancy period. Transplants easily.

#### Source(s)

Seed collected from 8th Street, Corvallis, OR.