

# Horse chestnuts

**Common name:** horse chestnut

**Scientific name:** *Aesculus hippocastanum*

**Family:** Sapindaceae

## **Ecology:**

**Type of soil:** Deep soils, derived acidic rocks, granitic or volcanic soils, deep, well drained and rich in potassium. It can grow with acceptable yields in relatively poor soils, although are the most fertile soils that provide the best results of growth and quality of the wood

**Habitat :** Temperate-humid climate

## **Characteristics:**

**Appearance:** is a large tree, growing to about 39 metres

**Type of leave:** The leaves are opposite and palmately compound, with 5–7 leaflets; each leaflet is 13–30 cm long, making the whole leaf up to 60 cm across, with a 7–20 cm petiole. The leaf scars left on twigs after the leaves have fallen have a distinctive horseshoe shape, complete with seven "nails".

**Flower:** The flowers are usually white with a yellow to pink blotch at the base of the petals; they are produced in spring in erect panicles 10–30 cm tall with about 20–50 flowers on each panicle. Usually only 1–5 fruit develop on each panicle; the shell is a green, spiky capsule containing one (rarely two or three) nut-like seeds called conkers or horse-chestnuts.

**Reproduction:** Sexual (hedgehog fruit, chestnut seed), vegetative and by seeds

**Applications:** The chestnut tree is widely cultivated for its tasty edible fruits, the chestnuts, which are eaten raw or roasted and are used by confectioners. Its wood is used to make furniture, beams for decoration and construction, barrels, boats for tuna fishing. Its leaves are used as medicinal plants.

**Curiosities:** The horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) has nothing to do with the common chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), although its fruits are similar. Those of the horse chestnut, in addition to not being edible, are toxic.