

Sweet Chestnut                      scientific name *Castanea Sativa*

The tree is commonly called the "sweet chestnut" to distinguish it from the horse chestnut, to which it is only distantly related. The Latin *sativa* means "cultivated by humans".

The Sweet Chestnut attains a height of 20–35 m (66–115 ft) with a trunk often 2 m (7 ft) in diameter. The bark often has a net-shaped (retiform) pattern with deep furrows or fissures running spirally in both directions up the trunk. The oblong-lanceolate, boldly toothed leaves are 16–28 cm (6–11 in) long and 5–9 cm (2–4 in) broad.

The flowers of both sexes are borne in 10–20 cm (4–8 in) long, upright catkins, the male flowers in the upper part and female flowers in the lower part. In the northern hemisphere, they appear in late June to July, and by autumn, the female flowers develop into spiny cupules containing 3-7 brownish nuts that are shed during October. The female flowers eventually form a spiky sheath that deters predators from the seed.

The tree was a popular choice for landscaping in England, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries. *This species* was probably introduced to the region during the Roman occupation, and many ancient examples are recorded. More recently, the tree has been planted as a street tree in England, and examples can be seen particularly in the London Borough of Islington.

Chestnuts are traditionally roasted in their tough brown husks after removing the spiny cupules in which they grow on the tree, the husks being peeled off and discarded and the hot chestnuts dipped in salt before eating them. Roast chestnuts are traditionally sold in streets, markets and fairs by street vendors with mobile or static braziers.

Once cooked, chestnuts acquire a sweet flavour and a floury texture similar to the sweet potato. The cooked nuts can be used for stuffing poultry, as a vegetable or in nut roasts. They can also be used in confections, puddings, desserts and cakes. They are used for flour, bread making, a cereal substitute, coffee substitute, a thickener in soups and other cookery uses, as well as for fattening stock. A sugar can be extracted from them.

Roman soldiers were given chestnut porridge before going into battle.

The tree responds very well to coppicing, and produces a good crop of tannin-rich wood every 12 to 30 years, depending on intended use and local growth rate. The tannin renders the young growing wood durable and resistant to outdoor use, thus suitable for posts, fencing or stakes. The wood is of light colour, hard and strong. It is used to make furniture, barrels (sometimes used to age balsamic vinegar), and roof beams notably in southern Europe. It is also a good fuel, though not favoured for open fires as it tends to spit.

This example at Conyngham Hall is believed to be over 100 years old

Information from Wikipedia and Harrogate Borough Council.