

Horse chestnut

Aesculus hippocastanum

What to look for

A stout tree up to 30 metres tall, with a huge domed canopy and grey-brown, fairly flakey bark

Distinctive leaves, with five or more long leaflets

Large red-brown sticky buds

Clusters of white/pink flowers (not pink/red - that's a different species) that make it look like a huge candelabra

The big mahogany-brown conkers burst from a green spiky fruit (smooth cases tend to be the pink/red flowered species)

Leaves turn from orange to scarlet in autumn



Where found

Common in parks, gardens, streets and village greens

It was introduced from Turkey in the late 16th century and widely planted here

When to look

Leaves from April

Flowers in May

Leaves drop late October

Falling ripe fruit from September to October

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Not to be confused with...

Sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)



Did you know?

The sticky sap on horse chestnut buds protects them from frost damage and insects

The leaf scars left on twigs after the leaves have fallen have a distinctive horseshoe shape, complete with seven "nails"

Although the seeds are slightly poisonous to many animals, causing sickness if eaten, they are a popular winter feed for deer and wild boar

The annual world conker championship has been held in the village of Ashton, Northants, since 1965

'Conker' is derived from the word conch, and the childrens game was originally played with snail shells

A horse chestnut in the center of Amsterdam was mentioned in the diary of Anne Frank, 1942. The tree survived there until August 2010

Regional names include 'obblyonkers', 'cheggies' and 'cheesers'



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