PLANT FACT SHEET

Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

Aesculus hippocastanum L.

GENUS *Aesculus* **FAMILY** Sapindaceae

COMMON NAMES European horse chestnut

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Nut

The roasted seed is used as a coffee substitute.
CAUTION: This plant contains saponins which although poisonous are not normally easily absorbed by the body. It is nevertheless probably not wise to eat large quantities.
The seeds are eaten cooked. Before eating they are slowly roasted then often crushed and washed for 2-5 days in running water. They are then dried and ground into a powder. The starch of the seed is a famine food for extending bread flour, after removing the bitter element.

DESCRIPTION

A rounded spreading deciduous tree. It grows to 25-30 m high and spreads to 5-20 m wide. The stem is erect. The bark is smooth and grey when young but becomes cracked and scaly with age. The leaves are like the fingers on a hand with 5-7 leaflets. The leaves are 30 cm long. The leaflets are wedge shaped and broadest towards the outer edge. There are fine teeth around the edge. The leaves have long leaf stalks. The flowers are white with yellow and in clusters 30 cm tall. They occur at the ends of branches. They have a sweet honey like perfume. The fruit is a spiny green chestnut capsule. Inside there is a brown nut with a shiny skin. It has 1-2 glossy brown seeds inside. The seeds are 5 cm across.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It requires rich sandy loam. It is drought and frost resistant. It needs a protected sunny position. It can grow on poorer soils and in exposed positions. Trees are very hardy when dormant. In Melbourne Botanical Gardens. It suits hardiness zones 6-9. At Anvers Chocolate factory. Arboretum Tasmania. National Arboretum Canberra.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It is grown from seed. The seed need to be planted immediately after opening the nuts. Seed germinates quickly. Trees transplant fairly easily. Trees can be pruned heavily.

Harvesting and Seed Production

A fast growing tree. The tree comes into bearing within 20 years from seed. Trees live for 100 years.

NOTES

The seed contains up to 40% water, 8 - 11% protein and 8 - 26% toxic saponins. Esculin is contained in the leaves and fruit. There are 15 Aesculus species.
Also put in the family Hippocastanaceae.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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PARMENTIER (As Hippocastanum vulgare)

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