

Horse Chestnuts (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)

Deciduous, handsome long lived tree.

Flower is the symbol of the city of Kiev capital of the Ukraine.

Grown purley for aesthetic appeal as the wood is of a poor quality and suitable only for things like packing cases. As firewood it spits a lot.

Common name horse chestnut is reported as having originated from the erroneous belief that the tree was a kind of chestnut together with the observations that eating them cured horses of chest complaints despite this plant being poisonous to horses.

The nuts are rich in starch, but unsuitable for human food-they contain soap like chemicals. Conkers have been carried in the pocket to prevent piles & rheumatism & used in wardrobes to keep moths away. Also claimed to keep spiders out of the house by placing behind furniture, but need to be replaced as they dry up.

Most well known use of the horse chestnut is the game of Conkers- A game for 2, & it's entirley aggression. Collect the prickly green cases and break them open to reveal shiny brown conkers. Choose a nice big round shiny one and bore a hole through the middle. Thread a piece of string through and knot at one end. Players take turns at hitting their opponents conkers. There are under-handed ways of making your conker harder. The best is to pass it through a pig. The conker will harden in its stomach juices then you search through the pig waste to find the conker YUK.

In the past the seeds were used in France & Switzerland for whitening hemp, flax, silk & wool. They contain a soapy juice fit for washing linens etc & take spots out of both linen & wool & never damages the cloth.

A famous speciman was the Anne Frank Tree in the centre of Amsterdam mentioned in her diary & survived there till Aug 2010.

Diseases- Bleeding Canker

Half of all chestnuts in Great Britian are now showing symptons to some degree of this potentially lethal bacteria infection.

NOTES SANDIE DE GROOT 2011