

What Does It Look Like?

A horse chestnut grows in a tall dome up to 35m tall. The bark is smooth and pinky-grey when young, which darkens and develops scaly plates with age. The timber is creamy to light brown in colour with a smooth, soft, fine texture.

Each leaf consists of 5-7 pointed and toothed leaflets spreading from a central stem - a bit like the fingers of a hand.



In winter, the new leaves are hidden under large and very sticky brown buds. If you look at the twigs carefully, you might be able to see the horseshoe-shaped scars on some of the twigs left by last year's leaves.



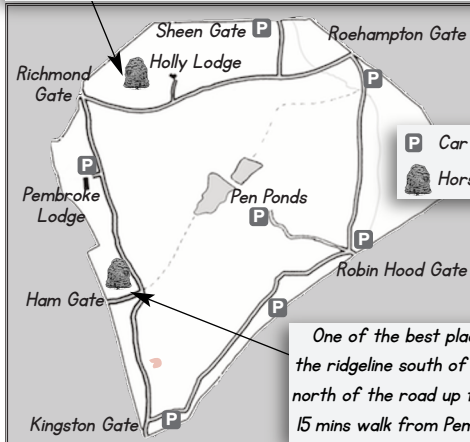
The flowers come out in late April or May and are known as candles, which they resemble. They usually have white petals with a splash of pink.



The fruits are called conkers, which are a fantastic glossy red-brown chestnut inside a spiky green husk, which falls in autumn.

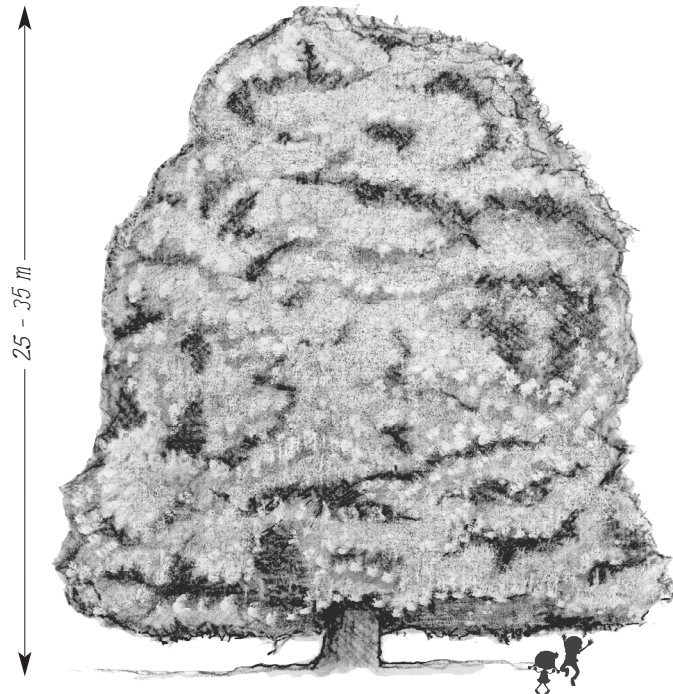
Where to Find Horse Chestnut in the Park

There are lots of them around the Park. One place is just east of Bishop's Pond (between Richmond and Sheen Gate) where there is clump of five on show.



One of the best places to see them is on the ridgeline south of Pembroke Lodge 250m north of the road up from Ham Gate - about 15 mins walk from Pembroke Lodge car park.

Tree of the Month May HORSE CHESTNUT



Horse chestnut trees were first brought to Britain in 1616 from Greece and Albania, and are now common in parks, gardens, and streets. They can live for 300 years.

The 'horse' part of the name possibly comes from its role in horse medicine - the seeds used to be fed to sick horses, and they were often planted around blacksmith's workshops.



The Tree of the Month is produced by the Friends of Richmond Park
Written by Christopher Hedley & Vivienne Press
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Great for Wildlife

- The flowers provide a rich source of nectar and pollen for insects, particularly bees.
- Deer and other mammals eat the conkers.
- Caterpillars of the triangle moth feed on its leaves.

Mum... why are those small humans taking our food?



I'm not sure dear. I think it's for some kind of game.

Please remember...

Most of the trees here in the Park were planted many years ago to provide food for the deer.



That is why we ask you not to collect conkers in Richmond Park.

How We Use Horse Chestnut

- The tree is mainly grown nowadays for ornamental purposes, in towns, private gardens and parks, and along streets.
- The most famous use of horse chestnut is in the game of conkers. This involves putting some string through the centre of a conker and then trying to smash your friend's conker before your own has been destroyed.
- Horse chestnut wood has a soft texture which is ideal for carving.
- The whole nuts are poisonous when eaten, although extracts are used in shampoo and in creams to treat bruises and strains.
- Traditionally the leaves and bark were used to make tea.



Threats

In the Park, most of the horse chestnuts are spoiled from July onwards by tiny insects called leaf miners, which burrow inside the leaves, causing them to go brown.



Horse chestnuts can also be affected by fungal diseases, especially by bleeding canker, which can kill the tree.

Fact or Fiction?

Conkers repel spiders...

Unfortunately, there's no proof this is true.

Conkers in your wardrobe help deter moths...

The horse chestnut seeds contain a chemical that wards off some pesky pests.