

The Buckeye Tree

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The Ohio Buckeye

Aesculus glabra, the Ohio buckeye, is native in the Midwestern and Great Plain states. In the south it's found in the Southern Appalachians and the Upper Piedmont. The tree grows 49 to 82 feet and can be 30 feet wide in the open. As an understory, it's half that size. In the spring, flowers grow in panicles from the green foliage in colors from red, yellow, to yellow-green. The leaves are a dark green palmate with 5-7 leaflets that are 3-8 inches long. The wood of the buckeye tree is lightweight and sturdy. It is used for artificial limbs because of its light weight, and it does not splinter. Native Americans used it for utensils, and they wove it into hats and baskets.

The trees produce a fleshy fruit that usually contains only one seed called a buckeye. The seeds fall to the ground, and the ones that survive the squirrels germinate in the spring, sometimes taking two years. The buckeyes, called nuts, contain tannic acid which is poisonous, but with heating and leaching, it becomes edible. The native Americans roasted the nuts, mashed them and made a delicious meal. They called them *hetuck*, which means buck eye, because they resembled the eyes of the white-tailed deer. The nuts are known to have medicinal properties, and they are a symbol of wisdom. They were carried in pockets and worn around the neck for good luck.

Because of a political remark made against General William Henry Harrison when he was running for president, the buckeye became a symbol of his campaign. A campaign song written for him about the buckeye became the symbol of the people of Ohio, who then became known as Buckeyes. The buckeye tree was adopted as the state tree in 1953.



Resources:

Photos courtesy of Ohio Dept of Natural Resources

<http://forestry.ohiodnr.gov/ohiobuckeye>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesculus_glabra

Best Native Plants for Southern Gardens
by Gil Nelson, pp. 165- 169.