

Facts and Folklore

Why are horse chestnuts so called?
Maybe because the crushed chestnut seeds were used to treat sick horses?
Is it because the leaf stem is horseshoe shaped when cut?

It is well-known that the horse chestnuts' fruit, its seeds, which is known as a conker has many health benefits and can be used to make medicine. Few know that from its leaves, bark, and the blossoms, medicines for several illnesses and diseases are made. For example, horse chestnuts are used as a medicine for vascular problems. It is interesting to know that there is research on how horse chestnuts can be used against cancer.

All parts of horse chestnut trees contain toxins, so this plant is considered as non-edible plant. The most poisonous part of it are the seeds, which contain TANNIN.

THE GAME OF CONKERS

Equipment:

Conkers, string, a tool to make a hole in the conker – e.g. palm drill, skewer, mattress needle

Instructions:

Choose a strong conker and make a hole through the middle of it, then thread the string through the hole and knot the string to secure the conker.

Two players take turns to attempt to smash their opponent's conker so it falls off its string, without damaging their own conker. When taking a turn, the person holds out their conker string at arm's length and the opponent takes a turn at hitting it. If the player misses, they have two more attempts.

Some rules allow the player to keep hitting the conker until there is a miss. The winning conker is called a one-er, when it beats another conker it becomes a two-er, then a three-er and so on.

Try different bashing techniques – shortening the string, moving closer.



Games

The horse chestnut tree and the seeds are known as conkers, taken from the game that involved conquering another's horse chestnut. In the UK, this game is 170 years old and would have been known originally as conquerors, shortened to 'conkers'.

CONKER BRAINSTORMING

Equipment:

Conkers, Large sheet of paper, markers

Instructions:

Draw the outline of a giant conker on the paper, or draw a whole conker tree with lots of conker outlines hanging from the branches, or a basket full of conkers.

As a group try and think of as many ways of using conkers as possible – you could reward each idea with a conker.

Practical Uses

CONKERS MEDITATION

Equipment:

Conkers – full pockets for everyone

Instructions:

Place conkers in pockets, or in small baskets or bags, so that everyone has their own conkers collection. Sit down comfortably, close your eyes. The meditation leader suggests the next steps, leaving time for a quiet, unhurried experience.

CONKER SMALL WORLD PLAY

Materials:

Whole conkers and some outer shells of conkers, oak acorns and acorn "caps", small sticks or tooth picks, sharp tools for making holes, plasticine or putty, pieces of coloured tissue paper, string, glue, thin brushes and paints – acrylic / markers / nail polishes.

Try not to give children lots of instructions straight away – let them experiment with the resources, and give younger children help to make holes.



Pappus

1. Put your hands in your pockets

(or basket/bag) and dip them in the conkers.

Turn the conkers in your fingers, smooth them, feel their smoothness, sphericity, texture and weight. Pay attention to how your hands feel. Does it feel good? Do you want to keep doing this, or do you want to stop? Are there other sensations in your body? Do the conkers make you feel relaxed, or are you tense, ready for action? Do you feel any emotion - if so, what kind?

2. Choose one conker and carefully examine it using just your hands – think about its size, shape, weight, surface texture. Move it to different parts of your body such as the top of your hand, or your cheek - what does it feel like?

3. Open your eyes and look carefully at the conker - try to describe it to someone who has never seen a conker, finding words for its shape, colour, size, weight – perhaps using comparisons.

4. How do you feel after this exercise? Maybe you have become "friends" with your conker and feel like carrying it with you? Or maybe you want to give it to someone as a gift with a wish attached? Perhaps you'd like to leave it in a pile with other conkers? Or hide it somewhere unexpected?

Instructions:

Combine conkers, acorns and other materials to make people, creatures and animals. Be creative and include fruits, berries and nuts: decorate them, dress them etc. Cut chestnuts and acorns in half and make stable bases from them that will allow the conker people to stand up.

Enrich the play by drawing a map of Horse Chestnut Land for the creatures to live in, or use them as pawns in a board game, use them as story starters, make "avatars" of individuals or their fairy tale allies.

Playful springboards: HORSE CHESTNUT

GET CRAFTY WITH CONKERS

Check out online scrapbook sites (such as Padlet and Pinterest) for hundreds of conker craft ideas – for example, chestnut chains and necklaces, horse chestnut wreaths, sculptures, pen-toppers and much more

DIY WASHING POWDER

Equipment:

3-4 kilos of horse chestnuts

Instructions:

Chop the horse chestnuts into quarters and then mix them vigorously until only small, powdery pieces are visible. Place them on a baking tray and bake in the oven at a low temperature until they are dry – now they can be kept for several months. After they've cooled down, store them in glass containers and your washing powder is ready. There are different ways of making conker washing powder – this recipe is from

www.pechundschwefel.eu/diy-waschmittel-aus-kastanien/

CONKER PETANQUE

Playing the Game

A game for up to 4 players.

Mark a start line with chalk or a length of string. The game leader places the target conker (the jack), on the ground a reasonable distance from the start line. The players take turns to throw or roll their conker towards the jack from behind the start line. When everyone's thrown their first conker, they take turns with their second conker, trying to get as close to the jack as they can. It's perfectly possible to push other players' conkers away from the jack, in attempting to get the closest to it! When everyone runs out of the conkers, the game leader points out the winner – the person who managed to roll their conker the closest to the jack. The winner of that round is awarded one point, and the game continues for the agreed number of rounds.

CONKER PETANQUE

Equipment:

Horse chestnuts, 4 different paint colours plus one very bright colour, flat ground

Making the pieces:

Paint 2 of the conkers in one of four colours. Paint an extra conker in a very vivid colour – this is the 'jack' Every player chooses a colour and gets two chestnuts to play with.

Games

The wood of the horse chestnut has a yellowish to slightly reddish colouring and is light to medium in weight. It is easy to work and is used for carving and for building lighter furniture and boxes. Since it has only low strength and elasticity, it is unsuitable as construction timber. Actually, horse chestnut is valued more for its appearance and not for its timber production.

Playful springboards: HORSE CHESTNUT

Games



NIM (SUBTRACTION) GAME

Equipment:
Conkers

Instructions:

This game is for two people, but also works very well in groups if there are sufficient conkers available. Create piles of conkers or rows of conkers (called nim-heaps). The players take it in turns to take away any number of conkers from a pile or row until there are no conkers left. Each turn, players can remove conker only from one pile/row. The winner is the player who takes the final conker.



CONKER RACING

A playful, cheerful and very simple competition that can be played with very small or bigger groups. This game is played barefoot, and develops the muscles of the sole of the foot, while providing fun for the players.

Equipment:

Two small bowls, conkers, timer

Instructions

Fill one bowl with conkers. The task is to move the conkers to the other bowl, using only the toes. If there are a lot of children in the group, form 4-5 groups and choose one person from each group to complete the task. The task can be timed to see who can complete the task in the shortest time, or put equal numbers of conkers into several bowls to find out how many conkers can be moved per minute, for example.

CONKER SCRABBLE

Equipment:

Conkers, acrylic paint, nail polishes and permanent markers

Instructions:

Collect conkers that are about the same size and shape.

Paint a large patch on them with pale coloured acrylic paint.

After the paint has dried, write a letter on each conker with a permanent marker.

The conkers are then ready to play word games with.

