

Aesculus californica

[Synonyms : *Aesculus californicus*, *Calothyrsus californica*, *Pavia californica*]

CALIFORNIA BUCKEYE is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to California (United States) it has small fragrant, white to rose-coloured flowers.

It is also known as California horse chestnut, Chestnut, and Horsechestnut.

This is the only North American species in this genus which has sticky Winter buds.

Warning – California buckeye flowers are said to have poisonous nectar – poisonous for bees ('Buckeye poisoning') and the honey they make. The fruit are inedible raw and are potentially poisonous. They can cause stomach upsets, and other symptoms.

Californica means 'of or from California (United States)'.

The Kashaya Pomo North American Indian tribes in California boiled the seeds in a large quantity of water to remove the bitter taste (and indigestible substances) and then cooked them for eating purposes. This process preceded grinding the seeds for breadmaking too. They were eaten (after roasting or boiling) by other tribes as well, including the Tubatulabal, Costanoan, Yana, Mendocino Indian, Kawaiisu, Miwok and Yuki. The Modesse Indians viewed the seeds as a famine food, and the Miwok stored some of their harvest for emergency rations as well.

Costanoan Indians and some of the Pomo tribe used the raw nuts for fishing. They scattered them across the surface of pools to stun the fish.

Its wood was also used by the Kashaya Pomo who not only used it to make bows but also fashioned a tool from it for making fires. The Mendocino Indian tribe started their fires by twisting sticks of California buckeye together so that the friction of the wood created sufficient heat for combustion to occur. In more mundane function the wood was carved into bowls by the Kawaiisu tribe who first hollowed a piece of wood out by burning the centre.

Nuts were used in veterinary medicine by Mendocino Indians to treat some of their livestock.

A few North American Indian tribes also included California buckeye in their medicine chest.

Both the Kawaiisu and the Costanoan tribes used chopped nuts as a suppository to ease piles, and the Mendocino Indian tribe and the Costanoans made a decoction of bark to ease toothache.

The fruit are eaten by squirrels.