Chrysolepis chrysophylla

[Synonyms : *Castanea chrysophylla*, *Castanopsis chrysophylla*, *Castanopsis chrysophylla minor*, *Chrysolepis chrysophila* var. *chrysophila*, *Chrysolepis chrysophila*]

GOLDEN CHESTNUT is an evergreen tree. Native to western North America it has long strong-smelling pale yellow catkins with cream stamens and spiny chestnut-like fruit.

It is also known as Castanopsis nut, Chestnut, Chinkapin, Chinquapin, Chinquipin, Eastern chinkapin, Evergreen chestnut, Evergreen chinkapin, Evergreen chinquapin, Giant chinkapin, Giant chinquapin, Giant evergreen chinkapin, Gold chinquapin, Golden chinkapin, Golden chinquapin, Goldenleaf chestnut, Goldenleaf chinkapin, Western chinquapin, and Wild chestnut.

The male catkins have a strong hawthorn-like (*Crataegus*) smell and (in addition to the wind) are pollinated by tiny gnat-like flies attracted by this. (Golden chestnut gives honey a bad taste if bees stray onto any flowers.) In some regions in North America the chestnut-like (*Castanea*) fruit are called ‘porkypine eggs’.

Chrysophylla is derived from Greek *chryso-* (gold) and *phyllo-* (leaf) components.

The nuts provided food for the Mendocino Indian, Yurok, Klamath and Pomo North American tribes. The Karok and Tolowa Indians ate them roasted and the former with the Pomo Indians stored the nuts for Winter use. The Paiute tribe made a tea from the leaves.

Today the nuts are still enjoyed locally and can be eaten raw, cooked or dried. In the latter form, ground, they can be mixed with other flours for making bread or used for thickening soups and stews.

The light reddish-brown wood has been used for veneering and making ploughs and other agricultural implements, tool handles, furniture and building interiors. However its most usually random growth and, authorities note, the difficulties in curing it are said to have curtailed its application on any large scale. Today it is still burnt as fuel.

In warmer regions in North America golden chestnut is cultivated as an ornamental tree.

©Sue Eland 2008