

Pachira insignis

[Synonyms : *Bombax ellipticum*, *Bombax spruceanum*, *Carolinea insignis*, *Pachira spruceana*]

WILD CHESTNUT is a tree. Native to tropical America (including north-eastern South America, especially Brazil) it has large, sometimes white inside, brownish-red to scarlet or purple flowers with curled-back petals and very many long white stamens.

It is also known as *Apombo* (Mexican), *Bosch-cacao* (Surinamese), *Carolina blanca* (Cuban), *Castaño* (Venezuelan), *Ceiban* (Cuban), *Chataigne marron* (Trinidadian), *Chataignier* (French Guianese), *Châtaignier d'Amérique* (French), *Colorado* (Haitian), *Estrella* (Puerto Rican), *Jelinjoche* (Costa Rican), *Majagua* (Colombian), Malabar chestnut, *Mame de mono* (Panamanian), *Mamorana grande* (Brazilian), *Pachirier remarquable* (French), *Pumpunjuche* (Honduran), Shaving brush tree, *Sunzapote* (Guatemalan), Trinidad pachira, Wild cacao, Wild chataigne, and *Zapote* (Mexican).

The flowers open at night or in early morning and fade and drop within one day. The seeds are chestnut-like (*Castanea sativa*) in shape and taste.

Insignis is Latin (distinguishing mark, token) meaning ‘distinguishable, notable, outstanding or remarkable’.

Like French peanuts (*Pachira aquatica*) wild chestnuts have a peanutty taste (*Arachis hypogaea*) when eaten raw and a chestnutty (*Castanea sativa*) or cashew-like (*Anacardium occidentale*) flavour after they have been roasted or fried. In Nicaragua the seeds, known there as Saba nuts, are a delicacy and sold in the local markets. They are also said to be particularly popular in French Guiana. When ground the nuts offer a substitute flour for bread. The flowers and young leaves are also cooked and eaten as a vegetable.

The bark fibre has been used for making cordage

In Amazonia the soft and lightweight, greyish-brown wood has been used for making buoys and plaques. Apparently the wood attracts cacao beetles and this quality has been harnessed on cocoa plantations to lure and trap them.

Wild chestnut was introduced to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1888.