

Aesculus pavia: Red Buckeye¹

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Introduction

Red Buckeye is a small North American native tree, capable of reaching 25 to 30 feet tall in the wild though is most often at 15 to 20 feet high when grown in cultivation. Red Buckeye is most popular for its springtime display of three to six-inch-long, upright, terminal panicles composed of 1.5-inch-wide, red flowers which are quite attractive to hummingbirds. These blooms are followed by flat, round capsules which contain bitter and poisonous seeds. The large, dark green, palmate leaves usually offer no great color change in fall and often drop as early as late September.

General Information

Scientific name: *Aesculus pavia*

Pronunciation: ESS-kew-lus PAY-vee-uh

Common name(s): Red Buckeye

Family: *Hippocastanaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 6A through 9A (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: reclamation; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; street without sidewalk; deck or patio; specimen; container or planter; highway median; shade

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

Description

Height: 15 to 20 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet



Figure 1. Young *Aesculus pavia*: Red Buckeye

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round, pyramidal

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: palmately compound

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Figure 2. Range

Leaf margin: serrate, double serrate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red
Flower characteristics: very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: attracts squirrels/mammals; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: thick
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: partial sun or partial shade, shade tolerant
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained; extended flooding
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes
Outstanding tree: yes
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

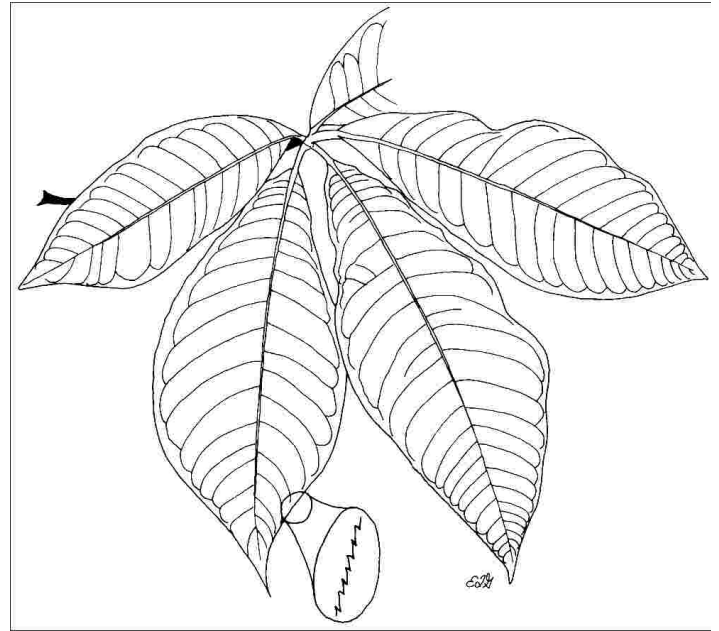


Figure 3. Foliage

Use and Management

The coarse, open structure and the light brown, flaky bark is quite attractive and offers great winter landscape interest. Branches arise from the typically straight trunk at a wide angle forming a durable structure. There are many, small-diameter branches with an occasional upright, aggressive one growing as large as the trunk. Main branches begin forming low on the trunk and remain there when grown in the full sun.

The tree is best used as a novelty patio tree or as part of a shrubbery border to add bright red color for several weeks in the spring and coarse texture during the rest of the year. Plant it in a medium- to large-sized residential landscape as a very coarse accent. Extremely coarse in winter without leaves, Red Buckeye will attract attention with the bright brown or tan bark reflecting the rays of the sun. Lower branches can be removed to allow for clearance beneath the crown, but the tree looks its best planted in the open to allow branches to fully develop to the ground.

Red Buckeye will flower well in rather dense shade but takes on its best form when grown in full sun with some afternoon shade on moist, well-drained soil. It is native along moist stream banks and is not very drought-tolerant.

The cultivar 'Atrosanguinea' has deeper red flowers; 'Humilis' is a low or prostrate shrub with small panicles of red flowers. Hybrids between *Aesculus pavia* x *Aesculus sylvatica* have been seen, bearing red and yellow flowers.

Red Buckeye is easily grown from seed, with plants flowering after three years.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.