

Horse Chestnut Tree - Activity

Suggested activity time

10– 20 minutes

You will need

Seed ID guide

Leaf ID guide

For **Curriculum links and learning objectives** see the Autumn programme



Activity

Let everyone feel the trunk – is it rough or smooth?

Find a Horse Chestnut leaf. Ask the children to use the ID sheet to identify it. Let them describe what it looks like.

Explain to them that although it is only one leaf, it has many leaflets. Some have 7 leaflets, some have 5. Count the leaflets together.

Ask the children if they know what nut can be found on this tree. They should be able to find them all over the ground and on the tree. This is a favourite with many children and so they should know that it is a conker. Ask them to describe what it looks like.

Find a conker which has the hard shell around it. Ask the pupils why they think this is so spiky. Explain to them that it is to protect the conker inside from the animals who may wish to eat it before it is ready.

Explain to the group that horse chestnuts are very important for wildlife and vice versa. The chestnut could grow as tall as the tree they are standing under given the right conditions. Their size means they are too big to be dispersed by wind. Instead horse chestnut seeds are dispersed from the parent tree by animals who collect them to eat during the autumn and winter. The animals sometimes store them in locations which are ideal for the fruit to germinate, and if overlooked the seeds may grow into a new horse chestnut tree. Explain to the pupils that if this process did not happen, the acorn would grow too close to the 'mother tree'. It would not be able to spread its branches, or receive enough sunlight, water or nutrients from the soil. The squirrel transports the acorn to an area where there will hopefully be more space for it to grow tall and strong.

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