



## Sweet Chestnut - *castanea sativa*



The best time to spot Sweet Chestnut trees is in the autumn when ground beneath is littered with the chestnuts and their prickly shells.

Sweet Chestnut is common in Selsdon Wood and widely distributed. There are many in the northern part of the wood along Courtwood Grove and Avis Grove and in the west in Greenhill Way. In the autumn when the fruits fall these paths become uncomfortable for dogs, forcing them to tiptoe amongst the prickly shells (22/10/09).



The Sweet Chestnut is a lofty tree, growing as tall as the Oaks in Selsdon Wood. The bark is grey-brown and ridged with long straight grooves that make it fairly easy to identify in the winter. These fissures often have a spiral twist, which makes it look as though the tree has been wrenched round by a giant (below left 27/4/12).



The leaves are large and glossy, oval in shape and deeply toothed. They turn a golden brown before falling in autumn (above Broad Walk 19/9/09).



The flowers are long erect catkins, often hard to see as they are born in the upper branches. They appear from May to July and are shed in August, carpeting the ground beneath the trees. The prickly fruits fall in October. Each contains two to four nuts. These are the culinary chestnut and although those found in Selsdon Wood are often a little smaller than those in the shops they are perfectly edible when roasted.

The Sweet Chestnut is not native to Britain but was introduced in very remote times. Despite the superficial similarity in the fruit, the Sweet Chestnut is not related to the Horse Chestnut. The trees are long lived and can survive to an age of 500 years.

Take an autumn walk along Courtwood Gove - but don't take your dog!  
Look for the prickly shells and chestnuts on the ground beneath the trees and take some of the nuts home to roast.

Sweet Chestnut is widespread in Selsdon Wood.  
The map shows some of the main locations.

