

Why is Ohio known as the Buckeye State and why are Ohioans known as "Buckeyes"?



Buckeye Tree

According to one story from pioneer historians, it could have started at Marietta in 1788.

An imposing procession, headed by the high sheriff Col. Ebenezer Sproat marched to Campus Martius Hall to open the first court in the Northwest Territory. Col. Sproat, large and well-proportioned, made a commanding appearance with his drawn sword.

He greatly impressed the Indians. In admiration, they dubbed him "Hetuch," their name for the eye of the buck deer. The nickname stuck and Col. Sproat became familiarly known as "Big Buckeye." Later the name was passed on to other Ohioans and eventually to the state.

Another commonly accepted explanation is that the nickname refers to the large number of buckeye trees native to Ohio. However, all accounts generally agree that the name of the buckeye originated from its close resemblance to the eye of the buck deer.

In 1840, Gen. William Henry Harrison was elected President of the United States. During his campaign, buckeye wood cabins and buckeye walking sticks became emblems of Ohio's first citizen to win the highest office in the land. This forever set Ohioans apart as "Buckeyes." While for many years the Ohio buckeye was considered the state tree of Ohio, the designation was unofficial until 1953, when the Ohio Legislature adopted the Ohio buckeye as the official tree.

The Ohio buckeye tree is usually found along streams and on fertile bottom lands. Buckeye leaves, which open in early spring, have five leaflets four to six inches in length, attached at a common point to a long stem. The full grown tree is of medium size, seldom exceeding 24 inches in diameter and 60 feet in height.



Buckeye Leaf

In addition to Ohio Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*), a second species, yellow buckeye (*Aesculus octandra*), is also native to Ohio.

The two species are very similar and difficult to distinguish. They can most easily be differentiated by the seed pod. The pod of the Ohio buckeye is warty, while the pod of the yellow buckeye is smooth. Often confused with the buckeye is *Aesculus hippocastanum*, commonly known as the horse chestnut. It is an imported relative that has frequently been planted as an ornamental. However, the horse chestnut has sticky buds and usually has seven leaflets, while the true buckeye generally has five.



Yellow Buckeye Seed Pod



Ohio Buckeye Seed Pod

Buckeye wood is light and easily worked, and resists splitting. One important use was in the manufacture of artificial limbs. It is quite similar to and often used in place of basswood or linden for woodenware.

The buckeye nut is bitter and, if eaten in quantity, is poisonous to man. The poisonous quality apparently does not affect squirrels, which will eat the nuts in the absence of more desirable food.



Ohio Buckeyes

The buckeye has considerable folklore. It is renowned for its mystical qualities. Some people carry it as a good luck charm and prefer it to a left hand rabbit's foot or four-leaf clover. Others use it as an amulet and make vast claims for its ability to cure rheumatism and a wide variety of other ailments.

In any case, if you can say you are a "Buckeye", you are an Ohioan and your heritage is something to be proud of.



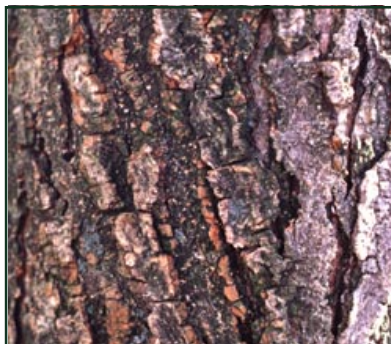
Ohio Buckeye Flower

The pale yellow to cream colored buckeye flowers grow in loose clusters six to eight inches high.



Buckeye Bud

Buckeye buds are not sticky.



Ohio Buckeye Bark

Bark breaks into flakes on flat scales.



1855 Fountain Square Court, H-1
Columbus, Ohio 43224
phone: (614) 265-6694
fax: (614) 447-9231
web site address:
<http://www.hcs.ohio-state.edu/ODNR/Forestry.htm>

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