

Sweet chestnut

The Tree

Stereotypical sweet chestnuts are gnarly old trees with wide, fluting stems. But sweet chestnuts have been grown as slender, straight coppices for timber production in the South of England and many other countries for centuries. The tree is, of course, also valued for its tasty fruit that is easily discernible by its spiky husk and used in many dishes, especially around Christmas time. Sweet chestnut leaves are elongated and toothed. Sweet chestnut is closely related to oak and beech, but not to horse chestnut.

Typical diameters up to 2 m

Height up to 35 m

Age up to 800 years

2% of UK broadleaved forest

Typical yield class 8

Sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*



Sweet chestnut
Picture by Calipo82, Wikimedia commons

The Timber

Sweet chestnut coppices have historically been used for construction timber, hop poles and piling. Due to its longstanding tradition as construction timber, UK sweet chestnut can be visually graded to strength class D24. Sweet chestnut from Italy can be graded to D24 as well.



Sweet chestnut wood

Sapwood pale

Heartwood clearly demarcated, medium brown

Coarse texture

Ring-porous with large, exclusively-solitary earlywood pores

Latewood pores in forked radial groups

Tylosis common

Rays barely visible

What do we know about home-grown alder?

Strength	Moderately low; comparable to alder and poplar
Stiffness	
Density (at 12% mc)	430 kg/m ³
Hardness	Medium-low; comparable to harder softwoods like larch
Machinability	Easy Cleaves easily
Durability	Durable (very durable)

Why is this information so vague?

Little is known about the properties of home-grown hardwoods. Some research was carried out by Lavers, starting in the 1950s and carrying on until 2002, but a limited number of trees was used in this research. Also, the testing was done on small clear specimens, and data for full-sized specimens with defects is rarely available. Nonetheless, we can use this data to compare between species, between timbers from the UK and Europe (or other countries) and between new data and historic results.

References & Further Reading

[The Wood Database](#)

[European Atlas of Forest Tree Species, Sweet chestnut](#)

[Woodland Trust, Sweet chestnut](#)

[Cotton, Scottish Furniture Woods](#)

Lavers, 2002, The Strength Properties of Timber