

# *Aesculus pavia*: Red Buckeye<sup>1</sup>

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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 3- to 6-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 that 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:** *Sapindaceae*

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

**Origin:** native to the southeastern United States, extending west to northeastern Texas and as far north as southern Illinois

**UF/IFAS invasive Assessment Status:** Native

**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



Figure 1. Full Form - *Aesculus pavia*: red buckeye

Credits: Gitta Hasing

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Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 15 to 20 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** round, pyramidal

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** coarse

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** palmately compound; made up of 5 to occasionally 7 leaflets

**Leaf margin:** serrate, double serrate

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval), obovate



Figure 3. Leaf - *Aesculus pavia*: red buckeye  
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**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 7 to 12 inches; leaflets are 2 to 6 inches

**Leaf color:** dark green and smooth on top, paler green underneath

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** bright red

**Flower characteristics:** very showy; emerge in clusters on panicles

**Flowering:** spring



Figure 4. Flower - *Aesculus pavia*: v buckeye  
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## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** ½ to 1 ½ inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts squirrels/mammals; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

**Fruiting:** mid-summer





Figure 5. Fruit - *Aesculus pavia*: red buckeye

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## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

**Bark:** light gray and smooth, becoming irregularly ridged and breaking into plates with age

**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:** full sun or partial shade, shade tolerant

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained; occasionally wet soil

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** none

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** yes

**Outstanding tree:** yes

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant

**Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

## 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 shrubby 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



Figure 6. Bark - *Aesculus pavia*: red buckeye

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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.

## Reference

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.