



## Walnuts & Sweet Chestnuts Cultural Instructions

Sweet chestnuts (also known as Spanish chestnuts) are a native of southern Europe and are now grown widely throughout Europe. When grown as a standard they will grow to a height of about 10m (35ft) within twenty years and after this period will continue to grow even taller. They are therefore not suitable for small gardens unless planted in a root control bag. There are two types of chestnut, the marron and the domestic and it is the former which is grown for its nuts on account of their large size and sweet flavour.

The common English or Persian walnut (*Juglans regia*) is native to China, Iran and southwest Europe. It can grow very tall, attaining a height of 25ft in 20 years and finally reaching 18-21m (60-70ft) unless planted into a root control bag.

### **Site & Soil**

Sweet chestnuts prefer to be grown in a light sandy soil where the pH is between 5.5 and 6.5. They will not succeed on a site which only has a shallow layer of top soil, is heavy clay and waterlogged in winter or in ground which is alkaline (pH above 7.0). They much prefer a site which is sunny for most of the day and sheltered from the prevailing wind. The tree will require staking and this is best done when it is first planted.

Walnuts will succeed on a wide range of soil types ranging from light sandy loams to heavy ones, provided they are well drained. The best soil for them is a heavy loam to a depth of at least 60cm (2ft) with limestone beneath and with a pH of 7.5 to 8.0. They prefer an open position provided they are given shelter from spring frosts during the flowering period. Temperatures below -20C (27oF) will kill the majority of the female flowers and this should be taken into consideration when choosing a site to grow a walnut tree. Walnut trees do not transplant as easily as most fruit trees and need very careful treatment for the first few years. The ground within a radius of 3-4ft from the stem should be kept weed free and dug over in the winter annually until the tree has become well established.

### **Restricting The Size Of The Tree**

By planting the tree in a Root Control Bag (R.C.B.), it is possible to limit the vigour of the tree. The R.C.B. restricts the tree roots, retaining the energy of the tree within. Only the white fibrous feeding roots find their way through the R.C.B. This prevents the tree from growing too tall and brings it into cropping earlier. The eventual height of the tree will of course depend on the fertility of the soil as well as many other factors.

### **Tree Form**

Sweet chestnuts and walnuts are nearly always grown as standard trees with a central leader in position throughout their life. The height to which the main stem should be allowed to grow before allowing branches to form is optional but is usually 1.8m (6ft).

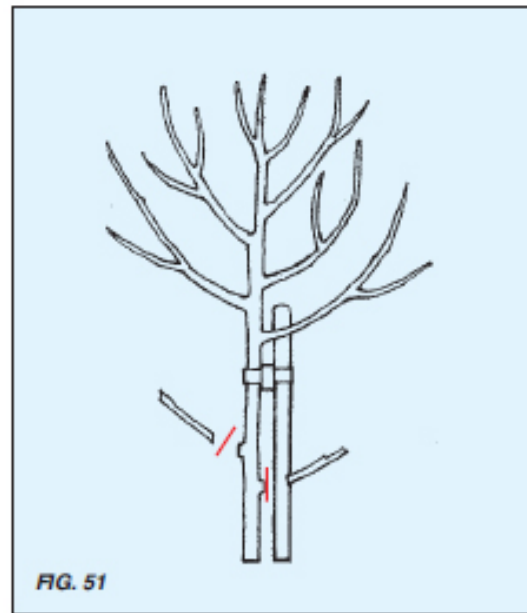
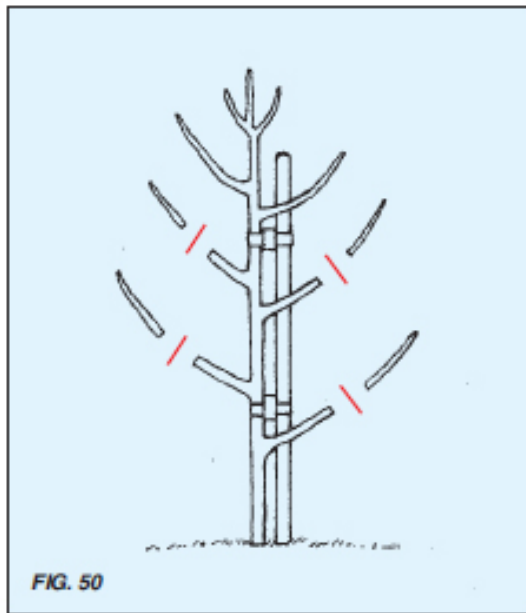
### **Pruning**

The pruning of walnuts and sweet chestnuts is largely the same; the main difference is the time of pruning. Sweet chestnuts should be pruned when they are dormant (during the autumn or winter).

Walnuts on the other hand should only be pruned between mid-summer and mid-winter. Walnuts should not be pruned in the late winter or spring as the sap rises early and the pruning cuts will bleed profusely. Also, it is advisable to protect the pruning cuts on a walnut with a wound paint.

At the end of the first growing season and in subsequent years, any side shoots that have reached at least 20-30cm (8-12in) in length should be shortened back by half of their length. Any side shoots produced later in the season and situated near the top of the tree, should be left unpruned (see fig 50).

At the end of the second growing season and in subsequent years, the lower side shoots that had been pruned the previous season and are not required as part of the main framework should be cut back flush with the main stem (see fig 51).



This above pruning process should be followed through every year until the desired length of clear stem has been achieved. At this stage the topmost four or five laterals should be retained. These laterals will form the primary branch framework of the tree.

Pruning of the primary branches will consist of shortening them back by a half in order to double the amount of framework branches in the following year. Once the main branch system has been formed (this takes three to four years) little pruning is required other than the removal of crossing branches in the winter and any weak shoots in the late summer.

## Harvesting & Storage

Sweet chestnuts and walnuts should be de-husked once they have fallen to the ground and have been collected. If this task is delayed for more than a few days the husks turn black and are then difficult to shell. Walnuts need to be brushed using a soft brush to remove the fibres present. The nuts should be spread out in a warm place to dry out, turning them two or three times a week. When absolutely dry they should be packed in barrels or earthenware jars. Walnuts should be packed with alternate layers of equal parts of dry peat and salt. Sweet chestnuts are best packed with alternate layers of sand. In this way they will keep for up to six months provided they are stored somewhere cool, dry, frost-free and away from vermin such as mice and squirrels.

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