Spanish chestnut is not a commonly planted species in Irish forestry and its occurrence is confined to small blocks in old estates or new broadleaved plantations. Coillte, the Irish Forestry Board, currently manage less than 100 hectares of Spanish chestnut. However, Irish nurseries produce and sell over 20,000 Spanish chestnut plants annually and these are purchased primarily by the private sector.

Uses & Markets
Spanish chestnut timber bears a close resemblance to oak in both texture and colour. It is often used as an alternative to oak for construction purposes. Copicing is the practice of cutting back a stem to the stump and managing the multi-stemmed regrowth that occurs as a timber crop. This practice can be carried out again and again without resorting to replanting. Typically, Spanish chestnut coppice rotations are managed over a period of between 12 and 16 years.

Spanish chestnut is the most important commercially managed coppice species. Coppiced chestnut is used for fencing and other local uses such as walking sticks, barrel hoops and hop poles. In England, chestnut is currently the most important commercial coppice crop.

Further Information
Further information on growing Spanish chestnut can be obtained from your local Forest Service Inspector or any Professional Forester.

Distribution & Provenance
Spanish or Sweet chestnut is a European species native to the Mediterranean region but with a range extending eastwards as far as northern Iran. In Ireland, the preferred seed sources for Spanish chestnut planting are French seed orchards. It is necessary to distinguish material for planting from edible nuts. The species was first introduced into Britain by the Romans. It is not known when the species was first introduced into Ireland.

Silviculture & Management in Ireland
Spanish chestnut requires a deep, free draining, moderately fertile and acid soil (pH 4.0 – 4.5). It is intolerant of frost and exposure and should be grown where summer conditions are consistently warm and preferably sunny. Spanish chestnut is a fairly strong light demander and requires regular thinning to retain crown vigour and to avoid competition between neighbouring crowns. Normal rotations of Spanish chestnut are between 50 and 70 years, at which stage the final crop should consist of approximately 150 stems per hectare. The species is long lived but older timber is considered to be of lower value as it is subject to spiral grain and shake.

In England, Spanish chestnut is the most important commercially managed coppice species. This is more prevalent on wetter soils, causing chestnut rots to rot and turn an inky colour while stems and coppice stools may die. Frost damage will cause forking and Spanish chestnut is susceptible to browsing from deer, hares, rabbits and domestic stock.

Non Timber Benefits
Spanish chestnut possesses the familiar chestnuts roasted at Christmas and used in a stuffing for poultry. However, the Irish climate rarely permits the swelling of these nuts and most of the chestnuts used in Ireland are imported from France and elsewhere in the Mediterranean region. Small nuts do develop in Ireland and these are a source for many wild animals. Spanish chestnuts are popular as free standing trees in large gardens and in a parkland context where they exhibit magnificent autumnal colouring.

Further Information
Further information on growing Spanish chestnut can be obtained from your local Forest Service Inspector or any Professional Forester.