

Wood Guide

Wood is an extraordinary material, probably the most versatile of all, and of course is incredibly warm and beautiful. From species to species, and indeed from tree to tree, there can be great variations in character, which is another of wood's charms. Above all, if harvested and managed responsibly, wood is renewable.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the woods available. The idea of this Guide is to provide a simple overview of the woods most commonly used by UK furniture makers.

It aims to help you when selecting a wood or woods for your bespoke piece, based on considerations such as cost, structure, colour, grain pattern, texture and sustainability. Of course, John is also on hand to answer your questions and offer advice.



Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)

This temperate UK and European hardwood is strong, with excellent bending qualities. The wood is pale in colour, with distinctive rows of open pores which look striking, even when stained. Olive colouring at the centre of the wood is more common in European Ash. As a timber, Ash is not under threat, is widely available, and for a hardwood its cost is relatively low.



Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)

Quite often used for countertops because of its hardness, Beech has long been popular with furniture makers because of its strength and consistency. It is a temperate hardwood, with a light-brown/pinkish colour and distinctive medullary rays, which appear as tiny dark flecks in quarter- and slab-cut boards. As its grain is close, smooth and indistinct, and it is one of the cheapest hardwoods available, Beech is also a good choice for those wishing to colour or disguise it as other woods.



Birch (*Betula pendula*)

A temperate UK and European hardwood, Birch is creamy white to a very pale tan in colour. It takes stain well, and as a result is often used in ready-to-assemble furniture. With a fine to medium texture and a good lustre and straight grain, Birch is widely available and relatively inexpensive.

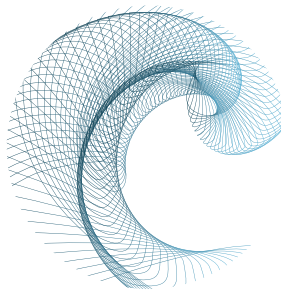


Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*)

The key characteristics of this 'true cedar' are its smell and ability to repel insects, making it popular for drawer bottoms and box linings. A temperate softwood from Europe and the Middle East, it is light honey-coloured with a pink-red hue in the latewood lines. Consistent in texture, its grain is mostly straight, but with some gentle curving, especially around the knots. You are unlikely to find certified timber and so it is important to check for threats to its sustainability in specific countries, but it remains an easy to source timber. It is expensive for a softwood and therefore usually only used for specific purposes.

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Cherry (*Prunus avium*)

Cherry offers interesting grain patterns and a mild light-brown or tan colour with some pinkish hues. It is fine and even textured, largely close and straight grain with some thin latewood lines. It grows extensively all across Europe, and there is no threat to its future. Despite this, it is not always widely available as the tree does not live very long and timbers are likely to come from dying trees. Because of its smoothness and consistency, it is an ideal choice for decorative features or panels.



Elm (*Ulmus hollandica*)

This temperate hardwood has a marvellous figure and grain, and luscious colour – pale honey with beige bands, light sapwood and beautiful swirling grain. It is quite soft for a hardwood, making it ideal for chair seats. Despite the ravages of Dutch Elm disease, it is still safe to use and relatively widely available from specialist suppliers. Its cost is lower than you might expect, but given its structural inconsistencies, wastage can be high and may affect the amounts of timber required for each piece.



Maple (*Acer saccharum*)

A temperate hardwood from North America, Maple is pale with darkening towards the heart and distinctive red-brown latewood lines. Even and fine in texture with a straight to wavy grain, it is a readily available certified and moderately priced wood. It is often used in kitchen construction due to its hardness and durability.



Oak (*Quercus robur*)

The quintessential English temperate hardwood, Oak is renowned for its coarse and wavy grain and its highly distinctive medullary rays. The English variant tends to have greater character than European sourced timber, and its wild flames of grain are used in all forms of decorative woodwork. Growing quantities of certified Oak are available, and it is a safe wood to use in terms of sustainability, although it can be expensive, especially for the highest quality quarter-sawn boards showing its grain to best effect.



Sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)

A strong and durable temperate hardwood, Chestnut is often used as a cheaper alternative to Oak. The heartwood ranges from straw coloured to brown, and the texture is coarse with a straight but sometimes spiralling grain. Although a non-threatened timber, Sweet Chestnut is not widely available (and European-sourced timber is easier to find than that from the UK), but neither is it expensive for a hardwood.

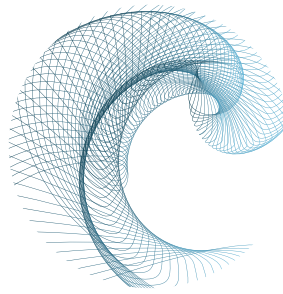


Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)

A temperate hardwood, Sycamore is creamy-white in colour with a fine and even texture and wavy or straight grain. Quarter-sawn edges can show beautiful shimmering lacewood. It grows widely and easily in the UK and Europe and is easy to obtain. One of the cheaper hardwoods, it is often likened to Maple, although it is not as hard.

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Walnut (*Juglans regia*)

Walnut is a temperate hardwood, sourced from the UK, Europe and the US. It has an extraordinary colour range and the most subtle and intriguing grain patterning, characterised by gentle undulating curves. The UK and European variants are less easy to source, more expensive and typically lighter in colour than the American 'classic black' walnut. Although certified sources of Walnut are hard to find, there are still plenty of walnut trees growing, and the timber is not classified as being at risk of extinction.



Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*)

Although a temperate softwood, the straight grain and durability of Western red cedar mean that it has traditionally been popular for outdoor use. Its red-brown colour with contrasting white sapwood ages to a silver-grey colour that needs no finishing when used externally. As a timber, it is rising in price as it is gradually diminishing and there is some concern that it is running out as the species does not regenerate readily. However, certified and sustainable sources do exist and it is still an economical timber.



Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

Yew is a coniferous softwood with a highly characterful wild grain and a superb colour. Its heartwood is a light orange-red brown, which darkens considerably with age. The sapwood, which is often used by woodworkers for a dramatic contrast, is white. Certified Yew can be sourced, but is relatively rare. As a result, it can be expensive.

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