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TYPES OF COMMON CARVING WOODS

Canadian
How To
Series



*Darkwood-woodcarving
Gary & Marie Crosby*

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This short e-book was created in Canada.

DEDICATION

First and foremost I would like to acknowledge and thank my wife Marie for her many years of standing behind me in this endeavor and assisting me in creating this book and others.

And

To all the woodcarvers that will use this book to create their own works of art.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are indebted to the thousands of Canadian and World woodcarvers and wood workers who have shared their ideas and experiences with us over the years through the internet and personal contact.

PREFACE

Over the past 28 years of carving and furniture designing Marie and I have gathered tremendous amounts of knowledge and skill learning for master craftsman the world over, from the shores of Africa to the jungles of Honduras, to the depths of the Black Forest in Germany and Eastern Europe, with its historical cultures steeped in tradition. We have taken all of this knowledge combined with a little Canadian flare and are now putting pen to paper to ensure this knowledge is passed on to future generations of woodcarvers and woodworkers.

Common Carving Woods

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This sort E-Book contains the basics that you will need to start carving and preparing your own plans. There are several types of wood & bark displayed in this short e-book that are used in woodcarving. But like everything else, there are conditions and characteristics of the wood that you should be aware of before you start any carvings. In the following pages we will discuss some of the types of Bark, hardwoods and softwoods that you can use to make your own work of art.

Cottonwood Bark

Locating Wood. The bark, used in bark carving, is found in most provinces of Canada and northern United States. The only hard part is finding it. I know for a fact that Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario have an excellent source and abundance of bark. The tree that provides the larger chunks is called Cottonwood. For the smaller chunks we use Black Poplar or Blossom Poplar. They grow in wet lands such as riversides or swampy areas. The tree grows very

Straight and tall with a short life span. The bark will fall off older trees at the base of the tree, but the best time to harvest the bark is after the tree has died. The bark will come off the tree in several large chunks



Do not remove the bark from trees that are still alive. That will damage the tree or kill it. And the bark is of no use to you until it dries for a year or so. If you pick up the old dead bark, you will be able to start carving within hours of getting it home. I would recommend you pick up two or three garbage bags of bark once a year and place them in a warm dry location. This will allow you to pick and choose your bark to match the pattern you plan on using. Bark carving makes excellent X-mass gifts for just about anyone, especially if they have a cabin or cottage. Just a reminder, if you plan on going out yourself to locate bark, ensure you get the landowner's

permission to do so. After all, it's his tree not yours and removing any of the bark without permission would be stealing. I've not yet met a landowner that would not let me remove bark from an old dead tree, and it helps if you give them one of your carvings when you're done. You will have a friend and a wood source for life.

HARDWOODS

OAK. *Is considered a coarse, porous wood and is mainly used in the construction of furniture and architectural wood carving. It is considered a very hard and stable wood. There are several standard types of Oak two of which are listed below:*

- a. Wood Name: Red Oak, (North America)
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 45 lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Fair
- d. Split Resistance: Good, but will split when left outside.
- e. Grain & Toxicity Course, porous considered not to be toxic, but when sanding a mask is necessary. Makes excellent furniture and is good for carving and staining, providing an old world look.



- a. Wood Name: Live Oak, (North America, Florida)
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 52 lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Fair
- d. Split Resistance: Good, dense considered not to be toxic but when sanding a mask is necessary.



MAPLE. Is considered one of the harder woods on the market. Its grain runs much the same as Oak, but you will rarely find a piece of maple that has perfectly straight grain. Maple comes in a variety of colors and is a very inexpensive wood to purchase. I've used maple and have found it to provide a very appealing color tone and strength:

- a. Wood Name: Maple, both light and dark
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 35-44 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Medium Hard
- d. Split Resistance: Good
- e. Grain & Toxicity: Moderate, Fine considered not to be toxic, but when sanding a mask is necessary



- a. Wood Name: Birds eye maple
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 35-44 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Hard to very hard
- d. Split Resistance: Good to excellent
- e. Grain & Toxicity: Fine, the wood has a tendency to chatter considered not to be toxic, but when sanding a mask is necessary



BIRCH. Comes in two main types, White Birch and Curly Birch and has a very straight grain. I've found Birch to be relatively easy to carve for a hard wood. The cost of Birch per board foot is reasonable, approx. \$ 1.75 to \$ 2.50 BF. This will depend on the location you purchase your wood from. Remember kiln dried wood is the best way to go. There will be less chance cracking once you have completed your carving.

- a. Wood Name: Birch
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 40-45 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Hard
- d. Split Resistance: Very Good



e. Grain & Toxicity: Moderate to Fine, Not considered to be toxic, but when sanding a mask is necessary

- a. Wood Name: Curly Birch
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 40-45 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Hard to Difficult
- d. Split Resistance: Fair to Good
- e. Grain & Toxicity: Fine, Not considered to be toxic, but when sanding a mask is necessary



ASH. Looks much like Oak but does not have Oak's soft red grain. I've used Ash mainly for a substitute for Oak. As for carvers wood Ash would rate between Oak and Maple and it is lighter than Oak in both weight and color. The only draw back is that during the staining process the wood does not hold a stain as well as Oak. One of the things I've used Ash for are Ball & Claw table legs. The mixture of dark and light wood grain enhances the look of the table leg.

- a. Wood Name: Ash
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 40-45 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Hard
- d. Split Resistance: Good
- e. Grain & Toxicity: Mild, Fine Not considered to be toxic but when sanding a mask is necessary



CHERRY. Is very hard and has irregular grain. If you look closely at the pattern of the grain you will see very light streaks of green and pink. The change in color gives the wood its soft color. Cherry mainly is a darker wood, somewhere in between Walnut and Oak. Once the wood is sanded down and a Tung Oil finish is applied, the wood gives off a lustre shine with a look of depth. As you can see I am a big fan of Cherry wood and would recommend its use in large wall mirrors or fireplace mantels and furniture carvings.

- a. Wood Name: Cherry
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 35 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Med Hard
- d. Split Resistance: Very Good
- e. Grain & Toxicity: Mod, Fine Not considered to be toxic but when sanding a mask is necessary



- a. Wood Name: Cherry Beryl
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 38 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Med Hard
- d. Split Resistance: Very Good to excellent
- e. Grain & Toxicity: Fine Not considered to be toxic but when sanding use a mask



This wall mirror is carved out of solid cherry, size 2 ft wide, 3 ft tall with a thickness of 1 inch and is carved with a floral rose pattern.

HONDURAN MAHOGANY (not to be confused with the other Mahogany species)

The name mahogany is used when referring to numerous varieties of dark-colored hardwood. Mahogany has a generally straight grain and is usually free of voids and pockets. It has a tendency to chatter up when carved or planned. It has a reddish-brown color, which darkens over time, which is an outstanding color for furniture or deep relief carvings and displays a reddish sheen when polished. It has good to excellent workability, depending on your skill set and is very durable. I like working in Honduran Mahogany mainly for the color and texture of the wood. Be warned when sanding or making dust of any kind make sure you use a good mask to protect your lungs.

- a. Wood Name: Honduras Mahogany
- b. Weight per Cubic Metre: 545 Kg
- c. Practical Workability: Med Hard
- d. Split Resistance: Good to excellent
- e. Grain & Toxicity: Fine is considered to be toxic when sanding, make sure you use a mask.



Canadian Napkin Holder



WALNUT Is dark brown to black in color its grain is irregular which makes this wood very attractive for table tops or for any carving that requires a large amount of detail. I've used walnut for Eagles, Black Bears and mantles. It is considered one of the best quality woods. For cabinet makers the order of quality is Pine, Maple, Oak, Cherry and then Black Walnut being the best.

This folding door above has an Oak frame and Walnut panels.

- a. Wood Name: Walnut
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 38 Lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Hard
- d. Split Resistance: Good
- e. Grain & Toxicity Mod, Fine Not considered to be toxic but when sanding a mask is necessary



SOFTER WOODS

Now we will look at some of the softer wood on the market. For first time carvers I would recommend you use soft woods for new carvers. This is mainly due to the cost and the amount of force required when carving hard woods. Soft woods, unlike hard woods have much looser grain and considerable weight deference. When it comes to large carvings, such as wall mirrors you will need strength. But if the carving weights too much, you will never be able to secure it to the wall, or depending on the size, to move it. This could be a considerable problem. The intent of your carving, or in this case a large wall mirror, is to hang it from your wall and not to rebuild your wall so you can hang the mirror. That's where soft woods come in; they provide you with a choice.

PINE. Pine is used by construction companies, furniture and cabinet makers. The wood is excellent for creating new patterns, new designs and just experimenting. It is one of the most inexpensive woods you will find on the market today. This wood is very light in color and weight and should not be used for anything that requires strength. For example; a wall mirror or detailed table carvings.

- a. **Wood Name:** Pine
- b. **Density Lbs per Cubic Ft:** 25 lbs
- c. **Practical Workability:** soft, and an excellent medium for first time carvers. It is both inexpensive and abundant.
- d. **Split Resistance:** Poor, Pine has a tendency to split and or run when carving tools are applied. Recommend using a stop cut more often when carving.

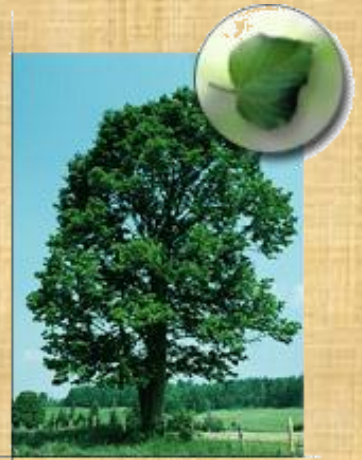


BUTTERNUT. *Is one of the softer carving woods on the market; with its natural color being light brown to dark brown in most cases? This wood is very light weight, much like pine, and should not be used for anything that requires strength. For example; a Detailed table or chair. However, it is excellent wood for smaller carvings. Butternut has been called the poor man's walnut and is fast becoming more difficult to find on the market. I personally love the wood, it carves excellent and has an outstanding finish, full of color and texture.*

- a. Wood Name: Butternut (Poor man's Walnut)
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 27 lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Medium, however it is an excellent looking wood once carved and finished with oil.
- d. Split Resistance: Good, never had a carving made of Butternut split on me.
- e. Grain & Toxicity Moderate to straight. Not considered to be toxic but when sanding or making dust a mask is necessary.



Basswood. This wood is considered the Carvers wood. Basswood is very light weight and holds detail well. If you're a first time carver I would recommend using basswood if not for its carving ability but to enhance your carving experience. I find bass wood carves nice and takes stain well, as in very even. The **basswood** tree, as we call it in North America grows to around 30m tall. There are some 30 species of the tree growing throughout the world with names such as **lime** in the UK and **lenden** in parts of Europe. Basswood is a deciduous trees, reaching typically 20-40 m tall, with oblique-cordate leaves 6-20 cm across, and are found through the north temperate regions.



- a. Wood Name: Basswood (the carvers wood)
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 0.471
- c. Practical Workability: Medium, however it is an excellent looking wood once carved and finished with oil.
- d. Split Resistance: Good, never had a carving made of Basswood split on me. But I have had large logs once completely dried out split up to 2 inches.





CEDAR. *Is one of the softest woods on the market? But it will split and chip up when carved. The biggest problem with cedar is of the cedar will fold over and not cut. However, the one thing I do like about cedar is its color. For example; Florida cedar is a bright red to soft pink color, and its grain is tighter due mainly to the fact that it grows all year round. Unlike its Canadian brother, B.C Cedar, which has to contend with the colder northern weather each year? The Eastern Canadian cedar is not quite as colorful as its western partner, but is just as abundant. Remember, Cedar loves low lands with lots of water or swampy ground, so when you're out looking for some good cedar on you property, wear your rubber boots and head for the swamp. I love using Cedar for backyard sculptures; it provides a long lasting medium that will also provide exceptional color contrast.*



- a. Wood Name: Eastern or known as white cedar
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 29 lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Medium , hard
- d. Split Resistance: poor
- e. Grain & Toxicity Fine grain with a large volume of knots. This wood is considered to be toxic when sanding or working the wood; Skin, Eye and respiratory protection must be worn.

- a. Wood Name: Western Cedar or known as Red cedar
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 25 lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Medium
- d. Split Resistance: poor
- e. Grain & Toxicity Fine

Considered to be toxic when sanding or working, both Skin, Eye and respiratory protection must be worn



- a. Wood Name: Florida Cedar
- b. Density Lbs per Cubic Ft: 29 lbs
- c. Practical Workability: Medium , hard
- d. Split Resistance: poor
- e. Grain & Toxicity Fine

Considered to be toxic when sanding or working, both Skin, Eye and respiratory protection must be worn.





Sumac grows in subtropical and temperate regions, and especially in north America. Sumacs are small bushes or trees with a high of approx 10m and is known as a flowering bush. The wood is a greenish color with white lines running through it. You can find large clumps of the bush in Canada some with diameters between 1 inch to 8 inches if you lucky.



So the bottom line is look in your surrounding areas for wood suppliers, you will find them in the most unusual locations. For example if you live in the city such as New York, Toronto, London or any major city in the world you will find furniture manufactures which all have a large supply of lumber ranging from Hardwood to Softwood used as a secondary wood. I use to cut up pallets from a local food supply depot; the pallets are made of Maple and sometimes Oak. If you're looking for larger chucks or for Bark you will have to venture out of the city or find a supplier on the internet which could be expensive.



This was a chuck of wood that was destined to be in the dump in Kandahar City; however, to me it looked like a spirit face. The wood was a Pakistani Pine and as such is quite harder than traditional Canadian pine. But add a little elbow grease and some paint and there you go.

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