

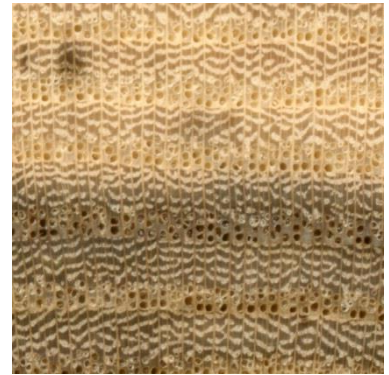
Wood of The Month



Face grain - Hackberry



Turned Hackberry Vessel



End Grain view

Celtis Occidentalis – Hackberry

The hackberry tree, which is closely related to elm, a medium-size tree, grows naturally across most, if not all, of the United States from the Atlantic coast to the Rocky Mountains and north into Canada. It can grow up to 90 feet tall with a rounded crown, gray bark with warty projections and ridges and produces purple berries from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in size which are edible and are a good food source for birds. The Native Americans ate the berries casually and also used them to flavor other foods. It is found in moist woodlands in bottomlands and uplands.

Hackberry is also called; bastard elm, false elm, beaverwood, sugarberry, nettletree, hacktree, and hoop ash. An interesting tidbit is that the tree serves as the host to the hackberry butterfly larva which feeds exclusively on the hackberry leaves. The hackberry tree is drought resistant and withstands wind and weather and is used as a shade tree, especially in the south, and can, to some degree, be a substitute for elm, however, it does grow somewhat irregularly.

The wide sapwood of hackberry ranges from pale yellow to greyish or greenish-yellow, and is frequently discolored with blue sap stain. The heartwood is not very different from the sapwood and may have yellow streaks. It is often said to resemble both ash and elm. The grain is sometimes straight, but can also be interlocked and irregular with a fine and uniform texture. Hackberry is moderate in hardness, is a heavy wood and works well with both hand and machine tools with a moderated blunting effect on cutting edges. The wood has very little resistance to insects and rot, so it therefore has little use outdoors and is used as firewood quite a bit. As a matter of trivia, hackberry was used to fuel the fires of the native Indians in the Southwest and northern Mexico for the Peyote ceremony known as the Ghost Dance. In these ceremonies the Peyote cactus, containing mescaline, was used as a psychedelic drug with hackberry being the source of the fire.

Hackberry can be used for some very pretty and interesting turned objects from pens to vessels. It takes a finish and polish quite well. It is listed as an irritant on the toxicity list, however somewhat insignificantly. It has been reported that hackberry spalts easily and does not turn punky as other woods.

You can read more about Hackberry at; [Missouri Botanical Garden](#) and [Wikipedia.org/wiki/Celtis_occidentalis](#) or on the [Wood Database](#).

Written by – Mel Bryan