

Wood of The Month



Sycamore Flat sawn



Sycamore Quarter sawn



Sycamore
end grain view

Platanus occidentalis – Sycamore

The American sycamore is also called; plane tree, buttonwood, buttonball, ghost tree and water beech. It is easy to see why it is called ghost tree especially in the fall and winter after its leaves have fallen with its huge scaly white branches spreading out reaching for anything surrounding it. The bark of the tree sheds off in large poster board like sheets making it a tree that needs constant cleanup effort all year long along with the constant rain of crooked sticks and huge leaves. The fruit is round dry balls about 1 to 1 ½ inches in diameter that persists through the winter and are food for Purple finches in late winter. The branches of the tree are crooked and bent often at 90 degrees to themselves. In the process, they can break off and provide nooks and crannies for birds and mammals seeking shelter.

The tree can reach massive proportions rising to 130 ft. and 6 ft. or greater in diameter. Some have even gotten to 13 ft. in diameter. The heartwood is light to dark brown or even reddish brown and the sapwood is whitish to light yellowish or reddish brown. The wood is generally irregularly interlocked-grained and though firm, tough and strong, it is not very heavy. Sycamore is very similar to maple in texture. When quarter sawn, the mottled texture with conspicuous rays is quite attractive and even dramatic. It is often used for guitar or other musical instruments. Because of its toughness, sycamore is a favorite wood for butcher blocks and buttons, hence the common name buttonwood. It is used for boxes and crates, trunk slats, brush backs, woodenware, and furniture especially as the secondary wood or quarter sawn for its appearance. The veneers are used for berry boxes, baskets for vegetables and cigar boxes.

Sycamore can be turned with ease and finishes smoothly when sharp tools are used. The turned wood can have a dramatic effect when the quarter sawn portion of the turned object is viewed contrasting with the plain sawn view.

Since the sycamore is fast growing and an excellent shade tree it is planted in urban areas and therefore can be fairly easily obtained when trimming or removal is required. It might be difficult to dry without warping or splitting without observing the proper precautions.

A fun piece of trivia is; “The terms under which the New York Stock Exchange was formed are called the "Buttonwood Agreement", because it was signed under a buttonwood (sycamore) tree at 68 Wall Street, New York City, in 1792.” Ref: Wikipedia.org

You can read more about Sycamore at; [The Wood-database](#) and [Wikipedia.org](#).

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