

## Wood of The Month

### Locust

#### Honey locust – *Gleditsia triacanthos*



#### Black locust – *Robinia pseudoacacia*



When you refer to “locust” here in Missouri you may be referring to a couple different unique species of woods. There is; Black locust, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, and Honey locust, *Gleditsia triacantho* with Honey locust being the most predominate.

**Honey locust:** Actually, within *Gleditsia* there are about 12 different species of deciduous, mostly spiny trees native to North America and Asia; one species is found in Argentina. Other names for honey locust are; sweet locust, thorny acacia, three-thorned acacia, thorny locust, honeysuckles, false acacia, and yellow locust. The tree has large, sharp, dense thorns which causes farmers to dislike the tree because it can easily ruin tractor tires. In some areas of the southern United States it is called Confederate pintree because its large spines were used to pin together the tattered uniforms of Confederate soldiers.

The wood of the honey locust is remarkably strong and durable. The wide yellow sapwood is clearly distinguished from the red to reddish-brown heartwood. Because of its color and grain structure, it is often mistaken for Kentucky coffeetree. Overall, it has a very attractive figure and striking grain pattern. It is heavy, hard, and stiff and has a tendency to split. It can be

difficult to work, requires sharp tools, has an attractive luster when sanded and finishes very pleasingly. Even though the wood possesses many desirable qualities, because of its scarcity it is little used. In its locale, it is used for fence posts, pallets, railroad ties, crating and general construction, furniture, interior trim and wagon wheels.

**Black locust:** The black locust is a little less abundant here in Missouri as it grows in dry or rocky upland woods, along streams, in pastures, thickets, and disturbed sites making the Ozark Mountains its native range along with the Appalachian Mountains. It has been introduced and naturalized elsewhere over the eastern United States and even in Oregon and other western states. The flowers, pea-shaped, showy, white, fragrant, in loose, drooping clusters, 4 to 5 inches long, are a good nectar source for bees. White-tailed deer browse the leaves and twigs and the seeds are eaten by quail and squirrels. However, all parts of the tree are considered toxic, including bee honey made from the flowers.

The wood is ranked as the seventh hardest of any tree in North America. It is highly resistant to decay and is used for posts and fuel. Pioneers used black locust pegs for pinning timber joints because the dense wood would not shrink on drying. Black locust is difficult to work with hand tools but is easily machined. It finishes very smoothly and will take a high polish. It was also favored for insulator pins used on power pole cross arms. It was ideal in the manufacture of wagon wheel hubs in the days of the prairie schooners.

The heartwood of black locust varies from greenish-yellow to dark yellow or golden brown, sometimes with a tinge of green, turning to a russet shade upon exposure to the air. It is frequently confused with that of Osage-orange (*Maclura pomifera*). They can be distinguished by the fresh-cut surface of Osage-orange which is usually a deeper shade of yellow or orange-brown, and the yellow coloring matter readily dissolves when shavings are placed in tepid water while very little coloring can be extracted from black locust. When seasoning, black locust is slow-drying and prone to warp or distort badly; there can be both end and surface checking.

You can read more about Black locust at; [Black locust on the Wood-database](#) and [Black locust on Wikipedia.org](#).

For Honey locust you may read more at; [Honey locust on Wikipedia](#) or [Honey locust on the Wood-Database](#) .

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