

Wood of The Month



American Beech – *Fagus grandifolia*

This month we will stroll into the beech. If you've never worked or turned beech you may want to consider this easy to turn wood because of its fine texture and straight grain. Beech is very popular for its excellent steam bending qualities and clear even color with numerous small ray flecks. American beech is dark to light reddish-brown with very narrow, nearly white sapwood. The growth rings are thin and tiny, and the rays are very numerous. It is hard, heavy, strong and uniform in texture with straight or sometimes interlocked grain. The quartersawn timber is quite attractive with rays conspicuous as darker flakes. The American beech's cousin, European beech, is even finer and lighter in color.

Common uses for beech include cabinetry where a very light, white look is desired, and including high-class joinery, laminated furniture, chairs, desks, domestic flooring, sliced veneer and utility plywood. Beech is also used in musical instruments, toys, sports equipment, shoe heels, tool handles and wooden ware. The close grain and good structure makes it suitable for turning, whittling, and carving. It has been a popular wood for centuries in the making of treen. Treen is kitchen utensils such as spatulas, spoons, ladles or other items. Also for items such as snuff boxes, bowls, platters, cups, ladles, chopping blocks, clothes pegs, mortar and pestle, and novelties. Beech wears well when subjected to friction under water, which creates some uses in the distillation field (hence the term "beechwood aged" Budweiser beer slogan). It is rated high in strength properties and shock resistance. Because it does not impart taste or odor to food, it is used extensively for food containers, baskets and butcher blocks. American beech is sometimes under-rated and under-appreciated in North America, but represents an excellent value when compared to other hardwoods such as Hard Maple. Beech sands to a high polish and finishes to a smooth appearance.

The Beech tree is a very impressive tree with its large, smooth trunk, huge limbs, and large, spreading canopy. The tree is long-lived (300 to 400 years) and fairly disease resistant. American beech is the only beech native to the U.S. It has a limited range in Missouri, restricted to the well-drained sandy soils of Southeast Missouri. Botanically, beech falls into the Oak family (*Fagaceae*). Some other names for beech are; red beech, white beech, stone beech and winter beech. European beech is one of the most commercially important trees in the United Kingdom. More European beech is used in the UK than any other hardwood. In the UK, beech is referred to as "Mother of the Forest," since it is one of the more prominent woods. European beech's existence is said to have helped the other hardwoods thrive because its leaves have a potent "drip" that kills weeds. The leaves also decompose to add to the richness of the soil. Long ago, English bodgers crafted the legs of Windsor chairs from beech trees they felled in the forest.

The long-wearing wood also became peasant footwear in the shape of shoes and clogs. And in the iron smelters of Germany, France, and England, beech was the fuel.

So, if you're looking for a delightful change of pace take a turn on the beech.

You can read more about American beech at; [American beech on wikipedia](#) and at [Wood Magazine](#).

Written by – Mel Bryan