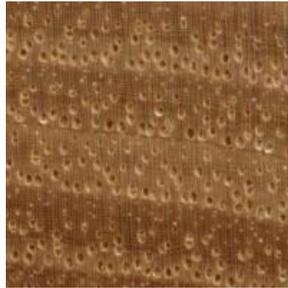


## Wood of The Month



### **Hickory** – *Carya* spp.

Chances are, in this, the bar-b-que season, you have enjoyed the flavor, and aroma and even the cooking fire of this month's "Wood of the Month", Hickory. That use, and being used as firewood are the less glorious uses of this wood because of its high thermal energy while being burnt when the wood is not suitable for its other primary uses. Hickory is one of the primary woods used for the handles of many tools, sporting equipment or anywhere a tough wood is needed. Hickory is denser, stiffer, and harder than either White Oak or Hard Maple. Additionally, it has excellent shock and impact resistance, and is used in applications where overall toughness is paramount. Of all hardwoods, shagbark hickory is the best wood for handles for axes, hammers, hatchets, and picks and nearly 80% is used for this purpose. Today increasing quantities are used for athletic goods, such as skis, lacrosse stick handles or golf clubs. Other minor uses include ladder rungs, drum sticks, inexpensive archery bows and agricultural parts. Hickory is probably the toughest wood in the US, thus the nickname "Old Hickory" of one of our ancestors, civil war general and president, Andrew Jackson.

Hickory is the genus *Carya* of which there are about 17 to 19 species worldwide. As many as 12 are found in the United States with about eight in Missouri. The *Carya* genus, or Hickory, is divided into two main groupings; True-Hickory, and Pecan-Hickory. Species in the True-Hickory group tend to be slightly denser, and therefore a bit harder and stronger than the species in the Pecan-Hickory group. Although the two groups of hickory can be reliably separated, identifying particular species within each grouping is usually not possible. The species in the Pecan-Hickory group, here in Missouri, include; Pecan, Bitternut hickory, and Water hickory. The species in the True-Hickory group includes; Shagbark hickory, Shellbark hickory, Mockernut hickory, Pignut hickory, and Black hickory. Shagbark hickory is probably the most common and the most likely to be found commercially however, all hickories are lumped together and no attempt is made to identify the species. Shagbark hickory requires careful seasoning to prevent splitting, checking, warping and other defects due to its high degree of shrinkage while drying.

The working properties are excellent, provided tools are sharp. A common problem during planing is tearout if cutting edges are not kept sharp. And it tends to blunt cutting edges. It is hard to nail without splitting and pre-drilling is required for screwing and it finishes well. No finish is used in many applications, such as tool handles, but it will finish satisfactorily with

varnish or oil stains. Bending properties are excellent and that is why it is used in Windsor chair building or other furniture making where bent wood is required. When turning hickory, the term “turn downhill” will become readily evident because of hickory’s tendency to chip out and split. Therefore, keeping your tools sharp is vital.

The heartwood is brown to reddish-brown. The very wide and nearly white sapwood is considered more valuable than the heartwood. The texture is rather coarse, and the grain is usually straight but sometimes wavy or irregular.

You can read more about Hickory at; [Hickory on Wikipedia](#) and on [The Wood Database](#).

Written by – Mel Bryan