

Wood of The Month



Black Willow – *Salix nigra*

Black willow (*Salix nigra*) is the largest and the only commercially important willow of about 90 species native to North America. Black willow is used for a variety of wooden products and the tree, with its dense root system, is excellent for stabilizing eroding lands. Willow grows on almost any soil, but its extensive, shallow roots need an abundant and continuous supply of moisture during the growing season. Black willow was a favorite for soil stabilization projects in the early efforts at erosion control. The ease with which the species establishes itself from cuttings continues to make it an excellent tree for embankments.

The heartwood of Black willow is light brown to pale reddish or grayish brown, frequently with darker streaks along the grain, usually straight-grained, moderately light to light, moderately soft, and moderately high in shock resistance. It stains and finishes well but is non-durable. The wood was once used extensively for artificial limbs because it is lightweight, does not splinter easily, and holds its shape well. It is still used for making boxes and crates, furniture core stock, turned pieces, table tops, wooden novelties, carving, doors, cabinets, polo balls, and toys. Black willow is also used for pulp. Because of its interlocked grain, Black willow is a very difficult wood to machine often resulting in fuzzy surfaces and tear out. It requires very sharp tools yet it glues well and takes a good finish.

Ancient pharmacopoeia recognized the bark and leaves of willow as useful in the treatment of rheumatism. In 1829, the natural glucoside *salicin* was isolated from willow. Today it is the basic ingredient of aspirin, although salicylic acid is synthesized rather than extracted from its natural state. Native Americans used the bark tea to treat toothache, stomach ache, diarrhea, dysentery, and dandruff.

You can read more about Black willow at; [Illinois Wildflower website](#) and on [The Wood Database](#).

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