

Wood of The Month



Tilia Americana –Basswood

The North American hardwood, Basswood, is also known as Whitewood, Linden, American basswood, American Linn, or American lime in the United Kingdom. The American basswood tree is a beautiful stately tree, which produces excellent shade and is used a lot as a “street” tree, lining boulevards and avenues. It grows to between 60 and 100 feet tall and a diameter up to 4 feet. It produces pleasant and fragrant flower in late spring or early summer, and the wood when freshly cut has a pleasant aroma that fades away as it seasons. The flower nectar is known for making high quality bee honey. The common name of basswood is derived from bastwood, in reference to the tough inner bark (bast) which has been used to make rope and mats that the Native Americans utilized for making strong, tangle-free rope; also thongs, baskets, and mats.

There is no distinction between the sapwood and heartwood. Both are a creamy white color when the tree is first felled, maturing to a pale brown when dried. The wood has a straight grain, a fine, uniform texture, and is soft, weak, odorless, and free from and taints very few knots. Basswood only has a 410 lb janka hardness rating compared to a 540 lb rating of poplar or to 600 to 700 lb rating for the pines. Although the wood is lightweight, it has an outstanding strength ratio.

Basswood is easy to work, being very soft and light. Perhaps one of the most suitable wood species for hand carving. Basswood also glues and finishes well, but has poor steam bending and nail holding characteristics. It works easily with both hand and machine tools, but needs thin-edged sharp tools for a smooth finish. Due to its soft texture, it does not stain satisfactorily but takes paint and enamel easily.

Basswood resists splitting in any cutting direction and is ideal for carving, cutting boards for leather work, pattern making and forms. Other specialized uses include artificial limbs, piano sounding boards, and harps. It is a good turnery wood, as it turns well. It is used for beehive frames, flat paintbrush handles, cask bungs, toys, clogs, venetian blinds, toys and novelties, dairy and food containers. It is rotary cut for core stock and plywood. And selected logs are sliced for decorative veneers for marquetry and architectural paneling. Other uses are for paper pulp, excelsior, and ventriloquist dummy heads.

The technical information on basswood can be found on the [wood database](#) .

Written by – Mel Bryan