

Bradford Pear



One often hears the question: “How does xyzwood turn?” The answer is usually something like “It turns great green, but it’s like rock when it gets dry.” How often have you heard that one? Well, I’m not going to tell you that -- even though its true. Instead, I’m going to *show* you my experience with Bradford pear in a photo.

The Bradford pear (*pyrus calleryana* “Bradford”), native to Korea and China, is said to be one of the most popular trees in the U.S. Planted for a century by developers as the “perfect street tree”, it is also now considered an

invasive species. The harbinger of Spring, this rapidly growing, moderately-sized tree with a compact, pyramidal shape blooms strikingly in April/May before the leaves emerge. The profuse, and slightly malodorous, white blossoms are followed by glossy, dark-green leaves throughout the summer. In the fall, these turn a vibrant wine color. This is an attractive tree – but its beauty is flawed. Due to vigorous growth, weak wood, and poor branch structure, they often begin falling apart after only 20 years, and they are consequently very susceptible to wind and ice damage.

One reason for my picking this particular wood to highlight is that these trees are abundant in the DC area, and they are brittle – big hunks tear off in every wind storm – so the wood is often readily available to a passing motorist (particularly one who might have a chain saw in the trunk). Don’t forget to ask permission. I got mine from my daughter’s front yard.

The wood is fine grained and, yes, cuts like butter with little tear out -- many turners sing its praises. It starts out as a nice creamy color but, like most woods, will darken a bit with age. The bark sticks on nicely without need for CA glue – surprisingly, even when harvested in June, as is the case here. It can be turned quite thin, and it warps artistically. Yes, it’s a fruit wood, and it does have a bit of a tendency to crack – it has to be dried carefully – or boiling would be an excellent way to go. It tends to bruise easily, so it will test your tool technique and get you to remove that unneeded sharp heel from your gouge bevel. It tends to be a little on the plain side, and there’s not much grain structure for an oil finish to “pop”, so it may give you a good excuse to try out some coloring, texturing, carving, or burning.

All that aside, the simple reason I like to turn Bradford pear is because I can get curls *five feet long!* Now that’s fun.

Always use common sense. Things that work in one situation may not work in another. Follow all Safety Rules. If it feels wrong, it probably is; stop and rethink. Your Mileage May Vary