

Woodturner's Wood Identification Project

We've all been there. You find or are given a piece of wood and you have no idea what it is. You comb through all your wood identification books, but they don't seem to give you enough information. The wood shown is of a flat plane looking board, the photo shows bark from the base of the tree or from a limb, or its hand drawn. The fact is as a woodturner you see more variety in wood in a month than a flat worker may see in an entire year or a lifetime. Simply stating its red oak is not enough for some of us; we want to know to exact species of red oak.

We all have a few woods that we encounter more than others, or some whose properties stick out in our mind that we can identify outright. Yet with so many different woods out in our local area it's hard for each of us to know every wood we come across.

I propose to change that by pooling our knowledge into a series of standardized pdf's we can collect and share with our fellow woodturners. Each document will contain a description of the tree and wood from a woodturner's perspective. To be clear this project applies to domestic woods only. The tree description should include any information that will help identify the wood on site:

- Description of the bark at the base vs the limbs
- Basic shape of the tree
Leaves,
- Other identifying characteristics

The wood description may include such things as:

- Color variation
- Smell
- Grain pattern
- Turning green vs dry
- Susceptibility to tear out
- Susceptibility to cracking
- Can the bark be incorporated into the design
- Types of turnings for the wood
- Finishing properties, etc.
- Any other useful information
- Safety concerns

While descriptions are nice pictures a better. A few basic pictures will be needed for each wood.

- Full view of the tree
- Leaves (maybe with a ruler for perspective)
- Bark at the base of the tree (old growth) and at the limbs (new growth)

This covers the tree itself. Now for the wood. These pictures can be taken after cutting with the bandsaw or chainsaw; no microscopes for these.

- Freshly cut endgrain (transverse)
- Fresh cut through the pith (Radial)

- Fresh side cut (Tangential)
- Completed project using the wood.
- Spalted (optional)
- Burl (optional)

While most can be obtained on the internet, I think it best if we take our own pictures. This is where I think our descriptions will differ from other wood identification resources.

This seems like a lot of work for one person, but if each member selects a different wood I can take that information, place it into a standardized format, and we can all have a valuable resource for years to come. It will also be useful if someone only has a piece of information. Each photo or descriptive can be added to the overall wood description so long as the exact species is confirmed.

I have yet to develop a standardized format, but I will try to have something by the next meeting to show everyone.

Another last suggestion is a sample collection. The standard for a wood sample is 6" X 3" X 1/2". If someone wants to donate a wood sample, it does not need to be cut to these exact dimensions; I would be willing to take care of that. I can also take microscopic shots of the samples (I have a small USB camera that can take shots up close at 4X). If it's okay with the members, I could keep these in my shop and bring them to meetings whenever a question of wood identification arises. The overall goal of this project is to have an active member of the club as a wood identification resource. Any other tips and suggestions are welcome.

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