

Western Hemlock - *Tsuga heterophylla*



Conifer. Height 150 feet to 200 feet tall. Trunk diameter 3 feet to 4 feet. Distribution on the Pacific Coast from Alaska south, throughout western Canada into central California, east to Idaho and Montana. This species, western hemlock, grows exclusively in the northwest and is one of the most important timber trees of that region. Because it tolerates deep shade exceptionally well, hemlock can grow to maturity in the thickest, deepest forest. Sprouting from living stumps, it replaces itself easily and can replace other species nearly as easily, eventually dominating the forest. Although referred to in the lumber industry by a large variety of nicknames, western hemlock is not a fir or a spruce; it is a pine.

Western hemlock is a stately, graceful and handsome tree. Tall and straight, it commonly forces itself up through the existing forest canopy. The wood is a pleasing off-white, tinged with pale purple, with small, sound, black knots. Although a lightweight softwood, it is very strong, stiff and shock resistant. The grain is straight, fine textured, free of pitch and works like pine. It dries well by air seasoning or kiln drying.

A hardworking soft wood, western hemlock is available in large dimensions, due to its tall, straight growth pattern. Because the timber is also free from large knots and defects it is often cut in lengths of 14 feet to 16 feet, 12 inches wide and 4 inches thick. It is easy to work and will not dull tools or cutters. It stains, paints and glues well. It is readily available and economical.



Historically, western hemlock has been used almost exclusively for building construction materials: sheathing, siding, sub-flooring, joists, studding, planking and rafters. It is also commonly used in the manufacture of boxes, pallets and crates. Because of its long, defect free lengths and dependability, it is used for wooden ladders and stair rails. Traditionally under-rated, it has more recently been used for flooring, joinery, and, in small amounts, as furniture and cabinetry. It is also used in the manufacture of overhead garage doors and in staircases.