

American White Oak - *Quercus alba*



It is a deciduous hardwood. Its average height ranges from 60' to 90' with a trunk diameter of 2' to 4'. It is the state tree of Connecticut, Maryland and West Virginia. Although many white oaks grow taller, the biggest is identified as the long time champion "Wye Oak". This famous oak grows in Wye Mills State Park, Maryland and is the traditional site of local weddings and festive gatherings. The National Register of Big Trees measures it out at 79' high with a trunk circumference of 374" and a crown spread of 102'. Over 400 years old, it was growing when the Pilgrims landed in 1620. Long lived and growing to vast proportions, the white oak is just one of 86 oak species native to this country, but it is the classic oak of America. Although prevalent throughout the eastern half of the United States, from Maine to Texas, white oak lumber comes chiefly from the South, South Atlantic and Central States, including the southern Appalachians.

The wood of the mighty white oak lives up to the reputation of the tree itself, a symbol of strength and dependability. The best oak timber comes from the tall forest trees which produce even, straight grained wood that is hard, heavy, strong and durable. It is insect and fungi resistant. The sap conducting pores are naturally plugged with the glistening water repellent substance, tyloses. This virtual water-proofing sets white oak apart from all other native hardwoods. It also machines beautifully, glues well and holds nails and screws very well. Its handsome color ranges from nearly white sapwood to a darker gray brown heartwood. It is much paler than its relative, red oak. The most decorative and interesting grain patterns are obtained by quarter sawing. "Quartered white oak" is often specified for custom contract jobs because it produces pronounced, long light-reflecting ray patterns. Depending on the way the logs are sawn into timber (rift-cut, flat sliced, flat sawn, rotary cut, quartered), many distinctive and sought after patterns emerge: flake figures, pin stripes, fine lines, leafy grains and watery figures. White oak finishes beautifully.

White oak was once the most valuable of all species in the American wood products industry. Today Douglas fir, a softwood, holds that honor, but white oak remains the most important hardwood. Historically and currently, it is the first choice when water resistant wood is needed. It was, and still is, used for keels, planking and bent parts in ships and boats. Oak kegs and barrels were, and still are, prized in this country's spirits production, for the aging and storage of wine, bourbon and whiskey. White oak is still the best all-around hardwood and remains in reasonably good supply. It is a valuable, rather expensive wood, but is usually less expensive than cherry and walnut. It is sold as veneer and as lumber in the full range of grades and thicknesses. White oak makes up into the most desirable and durable hardwood flooring. It is also one of the most popular choices for custom millwork: paneling, interior finish work, doors, cabinetry, store fixtures and fine furniture.