

Wood Tips

Over the year's we've gained and spread a lot of knowledge about wood and using wood for various projects. Here we share a few general notes:

- Wood is a natural product – that's the allure of it after all. That natural variations in color, grain, size/quantity of knots and so on are to be expected.
- Grade rules are a broad spectrum of guidelines grouping different qualities in boards together. Just like a stack of apples vary at the grocery store in size and color, boards will vary even within a grade grouping significantly.
- Wood products are generally the least expensive alternative and easiest to use.
- Never assume wood is ready to use "off the shelf". This includes boards on higher quality projects need sanding to clean off any dust in handling and remove marks. This sanding also prepares the wood for finishing. In addition, the end cut should never be assumed as plumb and straight. Most wood will come slightly over length – do count on every whisker, but for an example an 8' board most likely be 96-1/2" long.
- Related to this, it hard to sand TOO much (unless you're on plywood or special circumstances). Using progressively finer sanding – by whatever means will ensure a blemish free surface to apply whatever sealer you choose.
- Like fruits and vegetables, it is very likely the entire board may not be 100% useable.
- Lumber crayon marks can be removed with brake cleaner or sanding. Similarly, the printed grade stamp on the face of most boards must be sanded off or covered by your choice of finish.
- Even on pre-stained or other pre-finished items, some touch up will be necessary. For example, wherever an end cut was made, the end will need sealing.
- Virtually all wood is graded on only ONE face and ONE edge...
- The adage of measure twice and cut once is so true.
- If painting, using man-made products like MDF panels and trim, fingerjoint products and composites will generally be less expensive and provide a better end result. Benefits include better painting surface, , saving a priming step in finishing, more stable wood,
- A knotty wood will "telegraph" knots and pitch pockets through the paint.
- ALL fasteners will eventually stain any wood on exterior applications except for aluminum or stainless steel varieties. Redwood and cedar have good fastening properties but their natural tannins have a corrosive effect on some unprotected metals in close contact, causing a black stain on the wood.
- Pre-finishing is always the best way to ensure good coverage. We recommend that all wood sidings be pre-stained to not only save time in sealing the products after installation, but to ensure getting a good seal coat on all the surfaces of the boards – this includes the ends.
- Some softwood, specifically pine need a wood conditioner applied before finishing to avoid blotches.
- Poplar is a great choice in hardwood if you're painting. It machines and finishes well but it's vastly varying colors in the wood generally discouraged customers from staining or clear coating the wood.
- Lower grades of plywood have "voids" in their inner plys or layers. This is the result of knots falling out of the thin veneers used in gluing up plywood. While this may not affect your particular project, these ply should be avoided on subfloor applications (table legs or shoe heels can punch through upper layers because of that inner void) or in making boxes or cabinets, the voids may cause issues in construction – fasteners and clamping.
- Select all your hardware prior to starting your project – maybe even BEFORE you purchase your wood components! This is usually a hard step but also the hardware is this most visible portion of your project and makes it work. The hardware type/size/fasteners, etc. may necessitate a change in wood type, thickness, etc. Hardware may include fasteners, hasps, hinges, bumpers, box corners, and structural metal connectors.
- YouTube may have many instructional videos – we suggest you watch multiple videos to see a wide spectrum of techniques and details. What one video may omit or forget, another one will!
- Don't be surprised when wider boards aren't available. As a general rule the widest boards you'll find in any type of wood is a 12" nominal width (actually 11-1/4"). Wider boards are far less stable (more prone to cracking and cupping especially). We suggest gluing up a variety of boards to achieve the needed width for your project.
- We suggest using less expensive and easier to work with wood types such as pine, poplar or oak before moving on with that experience using walnut, maple or exotic hardwoods.

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- The final finish is important to the success and long life of your project. Oil finishes are tougher and bring out the color of the wood used. Latex (water based) finishes are easier to use and do not cause pine to yellow.
- Thinner plywoods are less likely to remain flat – these need to be supported as in the backing to a dresser or bookshelf unit.
- Many newcomers to Colorado's dry air do not realize how important design is to avoid splitting wood. Wood panels must be free to expand and contract with varying humidity levels.