

Intarsia Woods-at-a-Glance

Terms used in the chart relate to cutting, shaping and sanding. "Hardness" refers to the density of the wood. In general, the harder the wood, the more difficult it is to cut, shape and sand. "Stringy" wood must be worked with very sharp tools and sandpaper due to the slivers of wood that break along the grain creating burrs. "Prominent pores" lack the luster of woods with small pores even when thoroughly worked through the sandpaper grits. High "oil content" woods respond well to cutting shaping and sanding, don't burn easily and are more readily brought to a high shine. Photos of most of the woods on this chart can be found on page 43 in this issue.

	Wood Species	Color and Grain	Workability	Other Notes
Light	Aspen	White. Very subtle grain.	Easy. Sands very quickly.	Good wood for faces.
	Basswood	White to light yellow. Subtly visible grain when worked to high shine.	Easy. Sands well.	The most user-friendly carving wood.
	Cottonwood	White. Very subtle grain.	Easy. Sands very quickly.	Good wood for faces.
	Maple	Very white with subtle streaks.	Difficult. Requires large, sharp blade.	Finish barely affects color.
Medium-Light	Pine	Yellow to light yellow-orange. Wildly prominent & varying grain patterns with significant color contrast in rings.	Easy. Sands easily, but hardness can be inconsistent.	Often contains unusual figures.
	Butternut	Yellow-gray. Varied grain patterns with significant color contrast in rings.	Easy. Can tend to be stringy and require sharp sandpaper to eliminate fuzzies. Pores prominent.	Called "poor man's walnut" because it can be stained to look like walnut.
	Catalpa	Creamy gray.	Easy. Stringy with prominent pores.	--
	Poplar	Creamy gray to green. The figuring has a wide range of color.	Easy. Sands well.	Accepts stains and paints very well.
	Ash	Cream and medium brown streaks.	Challenging. Difficult to sand. Pores are open and grain is stringy.	--
	Red gum	Rich yellow-gray. Fine grain.	Challenging. Dense wood, but not too hard.	--
Medium	Chinquapin	Creamy gray-orange. Clear, smooth grain with occasional brown streaks.	Easy. Sands quickly but burns very easily.	Pleasant aroma. Looks similar to mahogany.
	Western red cedar	White to dark red. Incredibly wide range of colors.	Easy. Sands very easily. Its dust can be an irritant.	Is one of the most intarsia friendly woods because of its wide color range.
	Lacewood	Pink or orange streaks and creamy yellow streaks. Rings.	Challenging. Hard and soft rings create a rippling effect when sanded.	--
	Cherry	Light red-orange with white streaks.	Difficult. Burns easily and is very difficult to sand.	Turns very dark with time.
	Canarywood	Dark red with yellow and brown streaks.	Difficult. Very hard wood.	--
Medium-Dark	Mahogany	Rich red-brown to brown. Clear and/or streaked with red and red-brown.	Easy. Sands exceptionally well. Great to cut and sand due to high oil content. Can be splintery.	Not good for pieces with fine detail.
	Afrimosia	Red to yellow-brown with brown to dark brown streaks. Varied and interesting figuring.	Easy. Significantly stringy. Prominent pores. Tends to chip out along the grain.	Not good for pieces with fine detail.
	Padauk	Medium to dark orange-brown. Lots of grain pattern.	Challenging. Time consuming to sand, but worth the effort.	Significantly darkens with age.
	Bloodwood	Deep red. Little grain.	Difficult. Sanding is slow. Hard and dense wood. Requires large blade and patience to cut.	Can be brought to a splendid high shine.
	Purpleheart	Wonderful purple color.	Difficult. Fairly hard to cut and time consuming to sand.	Becomes very dark over time. Oil content so high that glued pieces may come loose over time.
Dark	Walnut	Medium to dark brown.	Easy. Consistent growth rings make it reasonable to cut and sand.	Sands to a magnificent high shine.
	Ebony	Rich black with occasional brown streaks.	Difficult. Very, very hard wood. Significant irritant.	Can add a great deal to a project as the pupil of an eye or a button. Polishes to a magnificent high shine.
Variegated	Tulipwood	Vivid, thin red streaks with yellow-orange streaks.	Challenging. Very hard wood.	Polishes to a high shine.
	Zebrawood	Dark brown and yellow-brown streaks.	Easy. Sands fairly well. Medium to soft wood.	Thin pieces tend to break along the grain.