

Western Hemlock

Western Hemlock



Latin (group) name: Tsuga
Latin (specific) name: Tsuga Heterophylla (Rafinesque) Sargent
Average max height: 125' to 160'
Average diameter: 1.5' to 4'
Associated state: Washington
Category: American Woods The Softwoods - Conifers

Wood Research

The Tree

The Western Hemlock is an important forest tree of the Northwest. It is 125 to 160 feet tall with a tall, clean, smooth-looking trunk one and a half to four feet in diameter. The bark of the younger large branches is thin, scaly and a dark russet brown, while on the large mature trees the bark is up to one and a half inches thick, hard, dark reddish brown and deeply furrowed. The small branchlets droop gracefully. The needles are one-quarter to seven eighths inch long, flat, narrow, grooved on the upper surface, rounded on the end, glossy and a deep yellowish green color. They remain on the tree from three to six years. The small pendant cones which are almost twice as large as those of Eastern Hemlock are three-quarters to one and a quarter inches long, are oblong-ovoid, have thin downy scales and are a reddish clay-brown color when the cones are open. This Hemlock is one of four hemlock species in the United States. The Western Hemlock was chosen the official State tree of Washington in March, 1947.



Western Hemlock bark



Western Hemlock cones

Common Names in Use

- Western Hemlock (Cal. and trade)
- Alaska Pine (N.W. lumbermen)
- California Hemlock Spruce
- Hemlock Spruce (Cal.)
- Hemlock (Alaska, Oreg., Idaho., Wash., Mont., and trade)
- Pacific Hemlock (trade)
- Pacific Coast Hemlock (trade)
- Pacific (western) Hemlock (trade)
- Prince Albert's Fir (Eng.)
- West Coast Hemlock (trade)
- Western Hemlock Fir (Eng.)

Growth Range

The growth range of Western Hemlock extends along the Pacific Coast from Prince William Sound in Alaska to San Francisco Bay, northern Idaho and western Montana. This species grows best in cool moist locations at elevations from 1,500 to 3,500 feet.

The Wood

Western Hemlock wood is fine textured, straight-grained, rather light in weight, soft yet harder than the Eastern Hemlock, and less splintery; non-resinous and a pale yellowish brown color. The narrow sap wood is almost white. This wood works well with tools, having some characteristics of pine in workability. It nails fairly easily but holds nails and screws poorly; glues easily; takes and holds paint quite well.



Western Hemlock post and beam ceiling

Uses

The Western Hemlock bark is used by tanneries and the tannin is said to be of better quality and higher percentage than the Eastern Hemlock. The wood is excellent for paper making because of its tough and easily bleached pulp. It is used in making fine book and printing papers. The lumber is used for all types of building material, boxes and crates, flooring, railroad car construction, furniture, ladders, playground equipment, refrigerators, sash, doors, general millwork, and other wood products.

Bibliography

Shelley E. Schoonover (American Woods) 1951 (Watling & Co.) Santa Monica, CA

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