

This week's TUTOR'S TIDINGS



Week 7

Friday 18th March, 2016

The **TUTOR'S TIDINGS** this week begins a **sequence of information** about beautiful (but usually expensive) woods of the world. However you too can have some of these woods as they can be imported directly from suppliers in the United States.

Go on spoil yourself, in your next order for pen parts, or other project kit-sets why not order a block or even a square section length of some of this wood.

For the next few weeks the information section of the TT will include info about:

- Purple Heart
- Bubinga
- Dalbergia – Rosewood family – Cocobolo
- Lignum-vitae
- Ebony
- Bocote
- African Blackwood
- Agar
- Sandalwood
- Pink Ivory

Note: While these trees are not native to New Zealand, turners can still obtain good supplies for small projects from several international traders. Here's one source:
Try looking at this catalogue:

www.woodturnerscatalog.com

-where you should find most of these woods listed for sale in various sizes.



So where will we start?
OK let's go with **AFRICAN BLACKWOOD (Mpingo)**

BEAUTIFUL WOODS of the WORLD - 1st in a series of 10.

Information About the African Blackwood (Mpingo) Tree

- The African blackwood tree is a member of the rosewood family
- Genus *Dalbergia*, species *melanoxylon*.
- Its name refers to the dark color of its heartwood, which appears black and is derived from the Greek *mela*, or *melanos*, which means **black**.
- The **Swahili language**, used in Tanzania, gives it the name *mpingo*.
- African blackwood is also referred to as **Grenadilla** in the music trade
- African blackwood is often **confused with ebony** (a different species)



African blackwood (Mpingo) grows in the savannah grasslands of east-central Africa, although it is more common in the coastal lowlands. Its leaves provide fodder for the great migrating herds along the Serengeti plain. The more mature trees have the ability to survive the sweeping grass fires which occur in the area.

An mpingo seed which has recently sprouted its first primary leaves is shown in the photo above.

- Mpingo does not grow in thick stands or under closed cover but prefers a more solitary existence, often taking hold in rocky and infertile soils where other plants cannot survive. This characteristic seems to derive from its inability to compete successfully with other plants.
- During its early years it develops an extensive system of roots to sustain its life during the long months of the African dry season. Its growth is incremental; it takes 70-200 years to attain a usable size.
- Most trees do not exceed a height of 9 m. (about 30 feet) and rarely exceed 0.3 m. (1 foot) in diameter.

- Some prize specimens have been reported with a 1 m. (3 feet) diameter and a 5 m. (16 feet) clear bole, but these were rare treasures of the woodlands and very old trees grown under excellent conditions.
- The main stands of blackwood occur in **Southern Tanzania** and **Northern Mozambique**, with about 60% of the trees in Mozambique and 40% in Tanzania. **Most blackwood is harvested from these two countries.**
- Smaller stands are also found in southern and eastern Africa: in Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and to a lesser extent, in the Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal and Zaire.
- Once considered plentiful in the 1930s, carvers now have to make extended journeys from their local villages in order to find suitable mature trees large enough for their work. There are reports that woodcarvers in Malawi and Kenya, finding it increasingly difficult to obtain adequate supplies of wood, are now importing it in some cases.
- International companies which log the wood for the instrument industry are having to travel longer distances for suitable wood as well.
- Botanists are concerned that, with consistent logging of only large trees with a straight bole, the genetic strain itself is becoming inferior since seeds from such prime specimens are increasingly less available.
- These economic realities simply increase the danger of illegal felling in protected areas.
- **It is a protected species in Tanzania**, but the country lacks the resources to enforce the laws limiting its use.

Color/Appearance: Often completely black, with little or no discernible grain. Occasionally slightly lighter, with a dark brown or purplish hue. The pale yellow sapwood is usually very thin, and is **clearly demarcated** from the darker heartwood.

Grain/Texture: African Blackwood has a fine, even texture, with small pores that should not require filling; the grain is typically straight.

Rot Resistance: Heartwood is rated as very durable in regards to decay resistance, though only moderately resistant to insect attack. The sapwood is commonly attacked by powder-post beetles and other borers.

Workability: Very difficult to work with hand or machine tools, with an extreme blunting effect on cutters. African Blackwood is most often used in turned objects, **where it is considered to be among the very finest of all turning woods—capable of holding threads and other intricate details well.** When made into clarinet or oboe bodies, the wood is typically

processed on metal-working equipment, giving it a reputation as being metal-like in some of its working properties.

Odor: African Blackwood has a mild—though distinctive—scent while being worked.

Allergies/Toxicity: Although severe reactions are quite uncommon, African Blackwood has been reported as a sensitizer. Usually most common reactions simply include eye, skin, and respiratory irritation.

Pricing/Availability: African Blackwood is very expensive, on par with true ebonies such as **Gaboon Ebony**. The tree grows so slowly, and is generally small and gnarly, available boards tend to be narrow—though large clear sections are occasionally harvested from older trees.

Common Uses: Musical instruments (guitars, clarinets, oboes, etc.), inlay, carving, tool handles, and other turned objects.

African Blackwood is considered to be among the hardest and densest of woods in the world.

Related Species:

- Amazon Rosewood (*Dalbergia spruceana*)
- Bois de Rose (*Dalbergia maritima*)
- Brazilian Rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*)
- Burmese Blackwood (*Dalbergia cultrata*)
- Burmese Rosewood (*Dalbergia oliveri*)
- Cocobolo (*Dalbergia retusa*) *Hey this is my favourite Dalbergia!*
- East Indian Rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*)
- Honduran Rosewood (*Dalbergia stevensonii*)
- Kingwood (*Dalbergia cearensis*)
- Madagascar Rosewood (*Dalbergia baronii*)
- Siamese Rosewood (*Dalbergia cochinchinensis*)
- Sissoo (*Dalbergia sissoo*)
- Tulipwood (*Dalbergia decipularis*)
- Yucatan Rosewood (*Dalbergia tucurensis*)

Look!

- Clive

Picture of a slab of African Blackwood

Very black heart wood - Very pale sapwood-

Highly prized turning wood.

Used mainly for musical instruments and art works



Exciting news!

Hamilton Woodturners' Club, now has its own website, thanks to the long hours of work of an enthusiastic member, **David Rose**. A wealth of backdated information has been already added to the website, so have a go and surf our new site with the help of the well-organized indexing system.

Use this address for access:

www.hwoodturners.org



Yayyyy! There it is. I found it on the Hamilton Woodturners' Club website

Woo Hoo!



I visited the **Fibreglass Shop** in Frankton to have an informative chat about the best embedding resin product for woodturners.

There are several different products that could be OK for some of the work we do with resin inlays.

So which is the best one to use?

Is the best product the one in picture to the left? Perhaps not.

It seems there are other **more suitable** products for woodturners and these items can be found displayed on the **Fibreglass Shop** shelves.

To help us sort out the **best embedding product**, one of the fellas I spoke to, (Terry Rillstone) has offered to come to a members gathering to show some of the products and give advice about the most appropriate stuff to use...and how to use it. We need to set a day and time for this 30-minute presentation. Cheers **Clive**

This week's Workshop Happenings



ROBERT's crush-grind pepper mill with its crackle painted base.

A fine work of art that is heading for Sydney.

MUHANNAD's Swamp kauri bowl.

Very old but very clean wood



DONAL has been busy during the week making two chuck spanners for the club.

Many thanks Donal as these ones fit the inserts better than the commercially made models.

Cheers

Clive

