

Types of Common Carving Woods

Basswood—most carvers start with basswood. Technically, basswood is classified as a hardwood, but it is relatively soft and easy to carve. Most carvers prefer basswood harvested from the northern part of the United States, because it has a more regular grain, which makes it easier to carve. It is a milky-white color and takes paint and stain well. It can be easily carved with hand tools, but it tends to get "fuzzy" if power carved. It is closely related to the European linden.

Tupelo—also called tupelo gum, is a southern wood species. Softer than basswood, tupelo is easier to power carve—it doesn't get as "fuzzy" as basswood. It is a little more difficult to carve by hand, and it requires a very sharp, thin knife for the cleanest cuts.

Butternut—a relative of walnut, butternut is a lighter and slightly softer wood with a distinct grain. Although harder than basswood, it is often used when the carver wants to give his piece a natural or clear finish instead of painting the carving. It usually costs more than basswood.

Walnut—a very popular carving wood. Walnut has a distinct dark brown to black color. Harder than basswood and butternut, it can still be hand carved easily.

It holds detail well and cuts cleanly with sharp tools. It is also more expensive than basswood

Mahogany—a classic carving wood most mahogany available today is grown on plantations in the Caribbean. Several species of mahogany are on the protected species list because of their popularity in woodworking. Mahogany is slightly softer than walnut but holds detail well. It has a brownish-red color and a distinctive grain pattern. A close relative, Spanish cedar, is easily identified by its distinctive aroma.

