

American Hickory & Pecan

These two hardwoods are usually indistinguishable as sawn wood although the living trees are different, so the logs are often mixed together for processing. Hickory and Pecan are the hardest of all the commercial American hardwood species – much harder than Hard Maple, for example.

Traditionally used for tool handles and flooring, the wood is also very suitable for tables and chairs; and is beginning to appear more frequently in Asian countries for furniture and flooring. The characteristics of these two species can vary from log to log as shown in the photos.



There are many species of Hickory and several of Pecan, one of which is known as Pecan Hickory. The trees grow extensively throughout the Eastern USA down to the Gulf of Mexico and as far west as Texas. They were an important part of the original forest mix encountered by the early European settlers. There can be a very strong differentiation between the wide, light-coloured sapwood and the darker heartwood which some manufacturers emphasise as a design feature.



The wood of Hickory is very hard and heavy with Pecan slightly lighter which is one possible way to distinguish between the two species. The main difference however is colour. In Hickory the white is lighter and the brown is darker than Pecan. Both can be stained easily to a dark colour so you may see quite dark furniture. Under NHLA grading rules sapwood is not a defect and for some buyers the light sapwood is preferred. The wood of both is generally straight grained. The high crushing strength and shock resistance makes them very suitable for flooring. The wood sands and polishes to a good finish, suitable for furniture.



Like all the commercial North American hardwoods, these species are sustainable and produced within a framework of best forest management practices and environmental legislation under the principle of selective felling and natural regeneration.

Sources:

www.ahec-seasia.org

www.nhla.com

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This article was written by Michael Buckley, hardwood specialist for business to business readers, and is sponsored by the American Hardwood Export Council. Technical advisor was Jack Grace of Robinson Lumber in USA.

Additional photos:

