

Relax, Reminisce, Rejuvenate in White Cedar Furniture

Introduction

White cedar is a great wood for indoor and outdoor furniture, because of its natural and environmentally sound characteristics. Found in the Northeast and most known for its uses on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket, white cedar is highly durable and very sturdy. This wood species is also blessed with natural preservatives that make it one of the most decay/rot resistant and insect tolerant woods available. Whether you're looking for rustic furniture, a cozy garden furniture setting or a grouping of Adirondack chairs to enjoy with close friends and family, white cedar could be for you.

Eastern White Cedar

Eastern white cedar has been used in Canada and the United States for over 100 years. The white cedar tree grows only in the northeastern United States and in southeastern Canada and is ideally suited to both indoor and outdoor projects. The eastern white cedar is also called northern white cedar, arborvitae and swamp cedar. Because it is often harvested from second and third growth forests, using strict sustainable management practices, eastern white cedar is not only a viable alternative, but also a better selection for your next outdoor wood project. Extremely resistant to decay, eastern white cedar furniture is a beautiful wood that accepts stain treatments well, or you can allow it to naturally weather to a fine gray patina.

Cedar in General

Cedar is a dimensionally stable wood, especially when kiln-dried, meaning it lies flat and stays straight, resisting the natural tendency as with other wood species to crack, shrink or warp, providing a splinter resistant and extremely smooth finish. Cedar also takes a stain well (as we will discuss a bit later) and reveals a rich character when stained. Cedar is one of the top ten preferred species for the home woodworker, and ranks third behind oak and pine as the wood most commonly used for ready-to-finish furniture. Additionally, cedar is uncommonly smooth-surfaced when sanded, making it more comfortable for outdoor furniture than other woods.

Finishing White Cedar Furniture

White cedar is used in landscaping, fencing, shingles, decks, log homes and for outdoor furniture, where its natural oils deter pests and mold. Adding an extra layer of protection (either stains, paints or polyurethanes) to cedar is smart insurance against possible premature wear. If you want protection and prefer not to see your outdoor furniture's grain, paints provide a layer of color that will keep the wood safely hidden from the elements.

Staining will impregnate your wooden outdoor furniture with chemicals that inhibit water, UV light and insect damage and add a layer of color to the surface of the wood. Whereas paint completely covers the wood, stains can leave the wood grain visible. Although not necessary, you may also desire to put a polyurethane finish on the furniture after it has been stained. Polyurethane behaves similarly to paint as it covers the wood. Some prefer to add this extra layer, although doing so can make reapplying a fresh coat of stain in the future more difficult.

When staining, if the outdoor furniture has been in use or outside for a period of time, it is best to lightly sand all surfaces before application using a Sand Sponge or sand paper. Try to stain the furniture when temperatures range from 50° to 85° F. Use a piece of similar wood or find an "out of the way" spot on the furniture to test the stain to ensure the wood is absorbing it to attain the desired color. Consider using a foam brush, staining the lower portions of the furniture first and working your way through the sides to the top.

Conclusion

White cedar is lightweight, very durable and extremely sturdy. The wood is prized for its ability to weather without treatment (unlike other species) and its ability to take finishes well. Because of this, northern white cedar is excellent for indoor, outdoor, and ground contact applications. With all of these benefits, it is easy to see why northern white cedar is considered the aristocrat of woods. It is a superior wood in its resistance to the elements and is considered one of the longest-lasting woods used in the lumbering industry today.

About the Author

Jay Gerth writes extensively about [cedar outdoor furniture](#). Specializing in [Adirondack chairs](#) and other furnishings, his expert opinions have helped others find satisfaction with and great uses for their outdoor living spaces.