



TIMBERS OF JAMAICA

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Timber most commonly refers to the wood of trees that can or will be used for building material. The word can also refer to living, standing trees themselves that will be used for building material.

Jamaica has had a wide use of timbers over the decades inclusive but not exhaustive of house and boat building, furniture, carts and wagons, railway sleepers, telephone posts, fence posts and growing sticks.

This list of timbers will feature some common timbers and their traditional uses.

PRIMARY TIMBERS

Primary timbers are the main species used for wood products. This includes logs, round wood, woodchips and lumber

1. *Hibiscus elatus* (Blue Mahoe)

Traditionally used for railway sleepers, furniture, flooring and shingles. It was also frequently used for carriage bodies, gunstocks, poles, ship's knees and fishing rods. The fibre was also used to make rope.

2. *Terminalia latifolia* (Broadleaf)

Uses include boards, shingles and barrel staves. The bark was also used in tanneries.

3. *Pinus caribbea* (Caribbean Pine)

Caribbean Pine was introduced to Jamaica. It is commonly used to build cabinetry, furniture, panelling, window frames, roofing, and floors.

4. *Cedrela odorata* (Cedar)

Used extensively for boarding in house construction and for shingles and furniture.

5. *Swietenia macrophylla* (Honduran Mahogany)

Exceptionally durable and is mainly used in cabinetry and furniture making.

6. *Swietenia mahoganii* (Jamaican Mahogany)

Exceptionally durable and is mainly used in cabinetry and furniture making.

7. *Cordia gerascanthus* (Spanish Elm)

Cabinet work and furniture.

8. *Tectona grandis* (Teak)

Used for shipbuilding, furniture, door and window frames.

SECONDARY TIMBERS

Secondary timbers are the lesser utilized species for wood products.

1. *Simarouba glauca* (Bitter Damsel)

Primarily used as splints for matches.

2. *Picrasma excels* (Bitterwood)

Used for ceilings, bedsteads and presses. Was also used to make drinking cups for medicinal purposes.

3. *Peltophorum brasiliense* (Braziletto)

Was used in the construction of vehicles, spokes of wheels, railway sleepers, and cabinet work.

4. *Brosimum alicastrum* (Breadnut)

Used for staves, flooring and ornamental work.

5. Bulletwoods (*Bumelia spp.* and *Manilkara sp.*)

Bumelia nigra, Cherry/Red Bullet

Bumelia salicifolia, White Bullet

Manilkara sideroxylon, Naseberry Bullet

Bulletwoods were the standard heavy constructional woods of the Island and were used for house framing, bridge runners, telephone posts, flooring and railway sleepers.

6. *Chlorophora tinctoria* (Fustic)

Used for mill rollers, furniture and cabinet work. Was exported as a dye wood for khaki.

7. *Antirhea jamaicensis* (Gold Spoon)

Was often used as a substitute for mahogany.

8. *Samanea saman* (Guango)

Used for furniture and ornamental purposes.

9. *Juniperus lucayana* (Juniper Cedar)

Used as ornamental wood and furniture.

10. *Guazuma ulmifolia* (Bastard Cedar)

Was used by coach and carriage builders.

11. *Oxandra lanceolata* (Black Lancewood)

Was exported to England as spars for carriage building, lances, fishing rods, billiard cues etc.

12. *Haematoxylum campechianum* (Logwood)

Was valued as dyewood. Other uses included fence posts, axe handles and was used for inlays in furniture making.

13. *Grevillea robusta* (Silky Oak)

Used for making small pieces of furniture, cabinet work and was also used as staves for barrels.

14. *Xanthoxylum flavum* (Satin Wood)

Used for cabinet work and farming tools.

15. *Calophyllum calaba* (Santa Maria)

Used for building and shingles.

16. *Matayba apetala* (Pigeonwood)

Used for posts and rafters.

17. *Thespesia populnea* (Seaside Mahoe)

Fibre was used to make ropes.

18. *Pithecellobium arboreum* (Wild Tamarind)

Used in cabinetry, floors, ceilings and ornamental work.

19. *Prunus occidentalis* (Pruan)

Was primarily used for flooring.

20. *Podocarpus spp.* (Yacca)

Podocarpus urbanii, Blue Mountain Yacca

Podocarpus purdieanus, St. Ann Yacca

Frequently used for furniture and was often used in rural areas for flooring.

Sources

Swabey, Christopher. 1941. *The Principal Timbers of Jamaica*. Kingston, Jamaica: Department of Science and Agriculture.

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