

Trees 'n' Timber

TOXIC WOODS

From time to time the question about which woods are toxic and therefore potentially dangerous to use, arises. Such an occasion happened at the recent Merry Month of May at the Riverland Woodworkers – which was an excellent event – congratulations to the team at Renmark, especially the ladies for the excellent food supplied.

A question about Australian Red Cedar started the ball rolling. I looked up the list of Toxic woods in my copy of "Australian trees and shrubs – common and scientific names and toxic properties", second edition, 2006, by the International Wood Collectors Society to discover that Red Cedar is indeed of some concern. Later, at the wood auction concern about Native Pine was discussed. At the Southern Turners meeting a week later, Blackwood was asked about – it too has some issues which should be considered. Below is a list of some of the Australian timbers which are considered toxic. This list is only a short one but highlights the worst of them. The issue of toxicity should be tempered by experience. Like Insect bites some of us are more susceptible than others. The remedy is – if a timber affects you – don't use it or at least take special care and use appropriate safety equipment.

Some of the worst Australian species you might use -

<i>Common name</i>	<i>Botanical name</i>	<i>Possible toxic effects</i>
Mulga	<i>Acacia aneura</i>	Headache, vomiting, irritation, may contain a poison
Dead Finish	<i>Acacia tetragonophylla</i>	Wood splinters and thorns cause skin irritation, dust causes dermatitis
Blackwood	<i>Acacia melanoxylon</i>	Dermatitis, skin reactions, asthma
Native Pine, Wh. Cypress Pine	<i>Callitris glaucophylla</i>	Dermatitis, swollen eyelids, asthma, nasal cancer Irritation to mucous membranes, boils, inflammation
Blackbean, Moreton Bay Chestnut	<i>Castanospermum australe</i>	Irritation to mucous membranes, nose, mouth, throat, genitals and armpits commonly reported. Note: This species is now listed for restricted use in commercial workshops.
Australian Ebonies and Persimmons	<i>Diospyros species</i>	Causes skin eruptions especially from splinters
Miva Mahogany Red Bean	<i>Dysoxylum mollisimum</i>	Congestion of lungs. eye and mucous membranes. Headaches, nosebleeds, appetite loss
Sugar Gum	<i>Eucalyptus cladocalyx</i>	Eye irritant especially from sap
Coolabah	<i>Eucalyptus coolabah</i>	Skin irritation from bark and dust.
S.A. Blue Gum, Yellow Gum	<i>Eucalyptus leucoxylon</i>	Irritation of nose and throat
Jarrah	<i>Euc. marginata</i>	Irritation of nose, throat and eyes

<i>Common name</i>	<i>Botanical name</i>	<i>Possible toxic effects</i>
Stringybark, Aust. or Tas. Oak	<i>Euc. obliqua</i>	Dermatitis, asthma, sneezing
Silky Oak	<i>Grevillea robusta</i>	Skin eruptions, blistering skin, eyelids, and mucous irritation and dermatitis, worse when wet
Myrtle Beech, Tasmanian Myrtle	<i>Nothofagus cunninghamii</i>	Irritates mucous membranes
Red Siris, Mackay Cedar	<i>Paraserianthes toona</i>	Irritating to eyes nose throat, sneezing, conjunctivitis, nosebleeds, dermatitis
Red Cedar	<i>Toona ciliata</i>	Violent headache, earache, giddiness, stomach cramps, asthma, dermatitis
Grass Tree	<i>Xanthorrhoea species</i>	Dermatitis, potentially carcinogenic

The list of exotic woods is large, but only a few of them are readily available, and a short list of them is set out below:

<i>Common name</i>	<i>Botanical name</i>	<i>Possible toxic effects</i>
Birches	<i>Betula species</i>	Sensitiser, those allergic to aspirin need to beware
Camphor Laurel	<i>Cinnamomum camphora</i>	Can cause dermatitis and shortness of breath.
Deodar Cedar	<i>Cedrus deodora</i>	Irritates mucous membranes
Cocobolo, Granadillo	<i>Dalbergia retusa</i>	Acute dermatitis, sneezing, conjunctivitis, asthma, nausea
Some of the Ebonies	<i>Diospyros species</i>	Can cause acute dermatitis, sneezing, conjunctivitis, skin inflammation
European Walnut	<i>Juglens regia</i>	Dermatitis, irritates nose and throat, nasal cancer
Wenge	<i>Millettia laurentii</i>	Irritates eyes, skin and respiratory system
Olive	<i>Olea species</i>	Eye skin and respiratory irritant
Douglas Fir, Oregon	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	Dermatitis, nasal cancer, irritates eyes and skin
Black Locust, Robinia	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	Wood dust and especially bark can be skin and eye irritant and cause nausea
Peppercorn	<i>Schinus molle</i>	Sap and wet wood irritates eyes and mucous membrane
Meranti	<i>Shorea species</i>	Dermatitis and irritation of eyes nose and throat
Teak	<i>Tectona grandis</i>	Dermatitis, conjunctivitis, skin eruptions, over sensitivity to light, swollen scrotum, nausea

Some anecdotal evidence to support the above list. One of the original Woodgroup members had real medical problems when turning *Blackbean*. A fellow member of the IWCS and a professional turner developed a strong

allergic reaction with *Blackwood* which further developed to include all *Acacia*'s he turned. Another member of the IWCS and a commercial furniture manufacturer developed major health issues by using *Red Siris* for furniture and had to give up his trade. Personally, I have difficulties when turning *Jarrah* which certainly irritates my nose. A member of the Northern Turners is particularly sensitive to *Camphor Laurel* as are those suffering from asthma. Although many enjoy the aroma, perhaps it should not be used when demonstrating to the public. It is interesting that many of the woods listed have a strong pleasant aroma – perhaps we should also be cautious about using those woods in public.

FOR YOUR OWN WELL BEING – IF A WOOD EFFECTS YOU CEASE USING IT OR AT LEAST TAKE PRECAUTIONS

Ron Allen.