

## Red Oak - *Quercus rubra*



Red oak grows only in North America and is found further north than any other oak species. It ranges from Nova Scotia in Canada south to North Carolina but no further south. It is found as far west as Minnesota. It is most prevalent throughout the Allegheny Mountains of New York State and Pennsylvania. The best wood comes from the tall, straight trees that thrive in the forests of these high mountainous altitudes.

The average height of the red oak is 60 to 80 feet. The average trunk diameter is 3 to 5 feet. The overall largest red oak, recorded by the National Register of Big Trees, is found in Rochester, NY. It measures only 60 feet tall with a trunk circumference of 370 inches, but it has a crown spread of over 90 feet! Another exceptional red oak grows on the campus of Smith College in Northampton, MA. It is 90 feet tall with a trunk circumference of 14 feet. A big, slow growing tree, red oak takes 20 years to mature and lives an average of 300 years.

Although red oak lumber is produced from the Atlantic, Central and Southern states, the very best wood, identified as northern red oak, comes principally from New England. Because the northern red oak is such a slow growing tree it produces hard, dense, heavy, tough wood. It is prized for its wearability. The color of the wood ranges from nearly white cream color sapwood to a beautiful warm, pale brown heartwood, tinted with red. The close, even grain is distinguished by rays which reflect light and add to its attractiveness.

Red oak is a dream to work with. Although hard to manipulate with hand tools it is easy to work with machine tools. It will not split when nailed and holds screws forever. It finishes beautifully because of its smooth surface and appealing color.



There is something reassuring about red oak. This is partly due to its handsome grain, its warm color and its dependability. Through history, it has maintained a romantic association with constancy - it is a symbol of strength and protection. Best known of all the American hardwoods, it was the prime building material in the earliest Colonial days. It was, and is, a fine choice for furniture, domestic flooring and interior millwork.

Red oak is available as veneer, but is especially abundant in the full range of grades and sizes of lumber. In an upper medium price range, it is an excellent value. This is because it is nearly as beautiful, strong and useful as white oak but is far more available and considerably more affordable. Red oak is extremely versatile. It is appropriate for all tastes of interior finish work and all styles of furniture, from traditional to modern. It bears repeating that northern red oak is the primary hardwood flooring milled today.