



Rosewood

A short introduction

By Ron McNulty 12th February 2025

What is Rosewood?

- Rosewood has nothing to do with the nasty prickly stuff your spouse wants to grow in the garden.
- Rosewood is a generic term for many species of tropical hardwood, mainly of the genus [Dalbergia](#). Some other species are regularly sold as rosewood.
- The name comes from the fact that it apparently smells like roses when sawn, but your mileage may vary.

How does it grow?

- Rosewood is grown in the Pacific islands, Brazil, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Central America and many other tropical countries.
- It flourishes in warm wet jungles.
- Trees typically take 20 years to reach full maturity and may live up to 250 years old.
- A mature tree may be 20 to 30 meters tall. Largest sub-species may grow to 2 metre trunk diameter.
- Size of sub-species vary wildly.

Rosewood Trees



Rosewood marvel - The Hindu
The Hindu



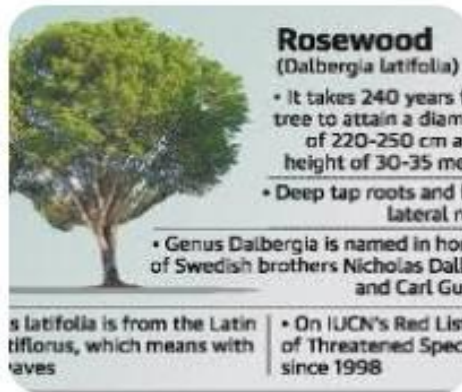
ENH386/ST227: Dalbergia siss...
University of Florida



Dalbergia latifolia - Wikipedia
Wikipedia



Rose wood
exclusive and unique interi...



Why rosewood is in the cross ...
The Hindu



People encircling 7 meter girt...
Alamy

What are its characteristics (1)?

- Very hard and strong.
- Beautiful colour and grain.
- Resonant timber, ideal for musical instruments.
- Turns well. Sanding dust is a mildly toxic irritant.
- Takes various finishes well, and polishes to an extremely high gloss.
- Available in NZ. Usually comes from the Solomon Islands.

What are its characteristics (2)?

- Heavy.
- Strong - Tends to heat up and wear out tooling.
- Slightly oily, making glue less effective.
- Expensive.

Where is Rosewood used?

- Furniture, mainly for the grain appearance. Popular for Asian furniture, as it has cultural significance.
- Very resonant. Sought after for guitar backs and is a timber of choice for woodwind instrument bodies.
- Somewhat out of fashion for woodwinds, as European boxwood is slightly superior and not subject to export restrictions. However boxwood is being attacked by a pest that kills trees, and will become rarer and even more expensive, and may well come under CITES control.

Rosewood Dining Suite



Guitar backs



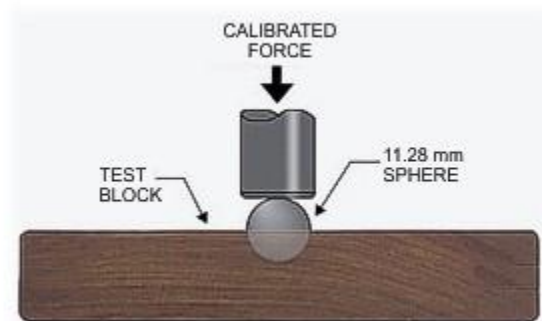
Bourgeois Guitars
DB Signature | Guitar Models ...



Essex Recording Studios
1966 Gibson 12 String Vintage '60s ...

Wood Hardness: The Janka Scale

- The Janka scale measures the hardness of wood species.
- A 11.28mm diameter steel ball is pressed into the timber until it makes a 50% deep dent. The force applied is used as the Janka scale rating. Multiple samples are averaged.



The Janka Scale...

- Result may be expressed in pounds force (lbf) or Newtons.
- I'll stick with lbf, as most information on the internet is in lbf.
- Softest timber is Balsa that scores only 70 lbf. One sample was found that scored only 22 lbf.
- Hardest timbers are around 5000 lbf

How hard is Rosewood?



Hardness compared to NZ Species

- Totara - Air Dried Janka rating : 605 lbf
- Macrocarpa - Air Dried Janka rating : 610 lbf
- Pine - Air Dried Janka rating : 617 lbf
- Kauri - Air Dried Janka rating : 730 lbf
- Rimu - Air Dried Janka rating : 769 lbf
- Matai - Air Dried Janka rating : 794 lbf
- Black maire (Hardest native NZ species) - Janka rating 1254 lbf
- Rosewood: 1780 lbf

Hardness compared to Australian Species

- Jarrah - Janka rating : 1910 lbf
- Black Ironbark 2860 lbf
- Lancewood (*Acacia sherleyi*) 3350 lbf
- Buloke (Hardest timber ever?) 5060 lbf
- **Rosewood: 1780 lbf**

CITES Status

- CITES is the United Nations *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species*. It monitors and controls international travel of items containing protected animals and plants. It ensures that long-term survival of species is not threatened.
- Most countries, including NZ are members of CITES.
- Most timber, including Rosewood is under CITES control. It can only be exported with proof of origin, and guarantee of sustainable growth. This involves lots of paper work, and drives the price up.

Cost and Availability in NZ

- Regularly pops up on TradeMe.
- Difficult to find any thicker than 50mm.
- In stock at Pacific Timber, Auckland (also known as Plyman) and possibly at other merchants.
- My last purchase: 140mm x 45mm x 3800mm cost \$280 including GST and courier charges. (Approximately \$74 per linear meter).

Questions??

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