



Cocobolo is a hardwood from Central America yielded by two to four closely related species of the genus *Dalbergia*. The best known and probably the species contributing most of the wood in the trade is *Dalbergia retusa*, a fair-sized tree, reported to reach 20-25 m in height. Because of its great beauty and high value, this species has been heavily exploited and the tree is now in danger of extinction outside of national parks, reserves and plantations.

Cocobolo is a very beautiful wood, known to change color after being cut. It is typically orange or reddish-brown in color, often with a figuring of darker irregular traces weaving through the wood. It is fine textured and oily in look and feel, and stands up well to repeated handling and exposure to water. The wood is very hard, and is easily machined. A common use is in gun grips and knife handles. Cocobolo is also quite dense, and even a large block of the cut wood will produce a clear musical tone if struck.

Only relatively small amounts of this prized wood reach the world market and it is expensive. Cocobolo is highly favored for fine inlay work, brush backs, knife handles, musical instruments (especially guitars and basses, Alembic Inc consider Cocobolo to be their house wood and many famous players such as Stanley Clarke use such basses; but also some woodwind instruments such as clarinets and oboes have been successfully made using Cocobolo instead of the more usual Grenadilla black wood), pistol grips, decorative and figured veneers, bowls,

*Dalbergia retusa*

Cocobolo

**Family:** Leguminosae

**Other Common Names:** Granadillo (Mexico, Guatemala), Funera (El Salvador), Palo negro (Honduras), Nambar (Nicaragua, Costa Rica), Cocobolo, Cocobolo prieto (Panama).

**Distribution:** Pacific regions of Central America and extending from Panama to southwestern Mexico. Of limited occurrence, usually in the drier uplands.

**The Tree:** A small to medium-sized tree 45 to 60 ft high with trunk diameters of 20 to 24 in.; usually of poor form.

**The Wood:**

**General Characteristics:** Somewhat variable in color when freshly sawn but heartwood usually becoming a deep rich orange red with black striping or mottling on exposure Texture fine; grain straight to interlocked; oily; without distinctive taste, odor slightly pungent and fragrant when worked. Fine dust may cause dermatitis.

**Weight:** Basic specific gravity (ovendry weight/green volume) 0.80 to 0.98; air- dry density 62 to 76 pcf.

**Mechanical Properties:** No data available, but is denser and stronger than Brazilian rosewood (see *D. nigra*).

**Drying and Shrinkage:** Reported to have excellent drying properties, free of surface and end checking. A kiln schedule similar to T1-B1 has been suggested. Shrinkage is usually low; high stability in use. Very low moisture absorption.

**Working Properties:** Reported to have excellent machining characteristics; natural oils give the wood a good polish, but make it unsuitable for gluing. Fine dust may produce rash resembling ivy poisoning.

**Durability:** Durability is high, has very high resistance to marine borer attack.

**Preservation:** No data available.

**Uses:** Highly favored in the cutlery trade for handles, inlay work, brush backs, musical and scientific instruments, jewelry boxes, chessmen, and other specialty items.

**Additional Reading:** (55), (56)

M 150 282-3Logs are delivered to a sawmill in southern Nigeria. African mahogany (mostly *Khaya ivorensis*) is in high demand on overseas markets. Export of logs from this region, as well as from most other tropical areas, is being restricted.

M 150 282-2 Band mills in Ghana are designed to handle logs 5 feet and more in diameter. Obeche or Wawa (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*) logs yield lumber favored for joinery and millwork.

M 150 273-14 In many areas of the tropics, fast-growing species are being introduced for future supplies of fuel wood and industrial wood. Batai (*Albizia falcataria*) is a favored plantation species in the Philippines.

M 150 273-13 Shores spp. is still the major timber group harvested in Southeast Asia. With modern chain saws, fellers no longer need scaffolding to get above large buttresses.

M 150 281 Felling of white lauan or almon (*Shorea almon*) with axes in the early 1900s in the Philippines. Most hardwood plywood now imported into the USA is produced from species of *Shorea*.

[M 150 273-9 Plywood mill in San Jose, Costa Rica, produces rotary-cut veneers mostly from banak (*Virola* spp.) and crabwood or cedro macho (*Carapa guianensis*). Logs trucked in from the Caribbean coast.]

M 150 273-21 Mahot or Tauary (*Couratari* spp.) grows from Panama south to the Brazilian Amazon. Trunk diameters may exceed 4 feet above the stout buttresses. In tropical American moist forests, single species usually make up less than 5 percent of the stand volume.