

## What to pyro on – timber selection

Selection and preparation of timber can make all the difference in the end result and make the whole process that much easier. It is possible to pyrography on just about any wood that comes off a tree but due to the high variety of structure and grain, the results vary considerably. For example, plywood is often used as a cheap starting base as it doesn't require a lot of preparation and is easy to source. If plywood is continued to be used, individuals start to get frustrated with the catching in the grain and the places which burn and then stop.

Often the individual believes there is something wrong with what they are doing when it is the issues of the timber alone that cause the problem.

The complication can arise when using pyrography to decorate a piece of woodwork in a different area. For example, a turner may select timbers more suitable for turning but may experience issues when pyrographing the finished product.

It would add much unnecessary time and effort if one tried to match the pyrography to the timber for every project. As all timbers can be pyrographed on if timber considerations in density, grain and workability are addressed. However, sometimes, for a show for example, timber consideration is wise for a better result especially if using a variety of woodworking disciplines in the creation eg, turning, carving, furniture etc

Always test your pyrography with a piece of scrap of the same timber if you can. If the same timber is unavailable, signing the piece is usually a good way of assessment. (see signing your piece) Note: It does help to sand the sample piece to the same grit as the final product to ensure consistent results. Do sample burns with and against the grain in different temperatures. Check for 'feathering'. Sand at highest number last used and repeat burns.

# Pyrography Timber shortlist

## OUTSTANDING

### **All and any fruit tree**

Due to the slow growing nature of fruit trees, they have a very tight and hard grain. Apple can be very light but pear and apricot have a darker yellow/brown colour.

### **Jacaranda**

Very hard, tight grain. Try and avoid mistakes as it can be difficult to sand. Very white.

### **Silver Ash**

Deceptive in appearance. Looks heavily grained but burns evenly as timber is very hard.

## VERY GOOD

### **Casurina**

Very hard timber. Burns well but can be hard to sand and prepare.

### **Osage Orange**

Light orange to light brown colour. Is medium softness but result is good

### **Chestnut**

Can have feature. Hard and burns well. Caution with grain variation

### **Box elder**

Yellow to white in colour. Medium hardness.

### **Rock maple**

Light in colour. Medium hardness. Good contrast

## USEABLE BUT NOT PREFERRED

### **Cedar**

Has a very consistent soft grain but can be dark and difficult for shading. Difficult to work with

### **Pine**

Is readily available and is used for toys, bookends etc. Light in colour but extreme caution with variation in grain.

### **Plywood**

Hoop pine or marine plywood is a cheap and easily accessible but does not give an even burn.

## NOT RECOMMENDED

MDF or any composite board have glues and therefore toxic when burnt. Recently, manufacturers have reduced the formaldehyde levels in MDF but it is not safe and the smoke when burning is toxic.

This list is only the first draft of what is hoped to be an extensive list of pyrography timbers.