

Hardwood Lumber and Veneer Series



Coffeetree

FNR-281-W

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EXPERT
REVIEWED

Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica* (L.) K. Koch) or Kentucky coffeetree, is an occasional tree ranging mostly from central Ohio to southern Michigan and Wisconsin to eastern Kansas south to Oklahoma and back to northern Kentucky. There are several isolated pockets of the species outside of the range given above. The tree prefers rich, moist woods, and it is intolerant of shade.

The tree is medium sized to large and can reach 100 feet in height. The largest reported tree is about 5.4 feet in diameter at 4½ feet above the ground.

Wood Color and Texture

The sapwood is a yellowish white and narrow. The heartwood is a reddish brown or reddish orange with a very prominent but straight grain pattern on flat sawn stock. The wood is ring porous like the oaks with the large pores plainly visible. The wood of the coffeetree is sometimes confused with honey locust.

Workability

Coffeetree is relatively dense and firm, and the wood has good working properties.

Strength

The wood weighs about 42 pounds per cubic foot or nearly as much as oak. Limited available information indicates the wood is similar in strength to the red oak group.

Steam Bending

No information is available.



Chip Morrison

A Cassen's coffeetree

Drying

Specific information on drying schedules is not available. The author has not seen serious drying defects in coffeetree wood, and it will probably not present serious problems in drying.

Shrinkage

Not reported

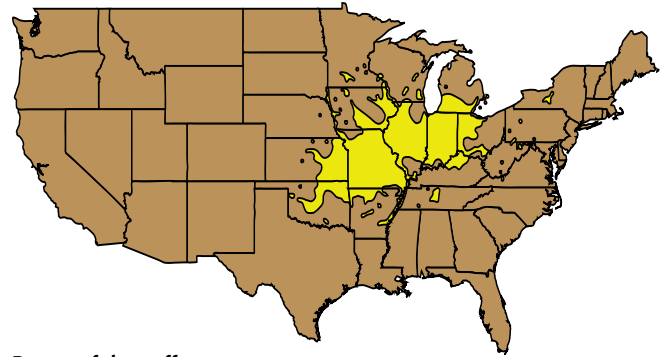
Decay Resistance

The wood is moderately resistant to decay.

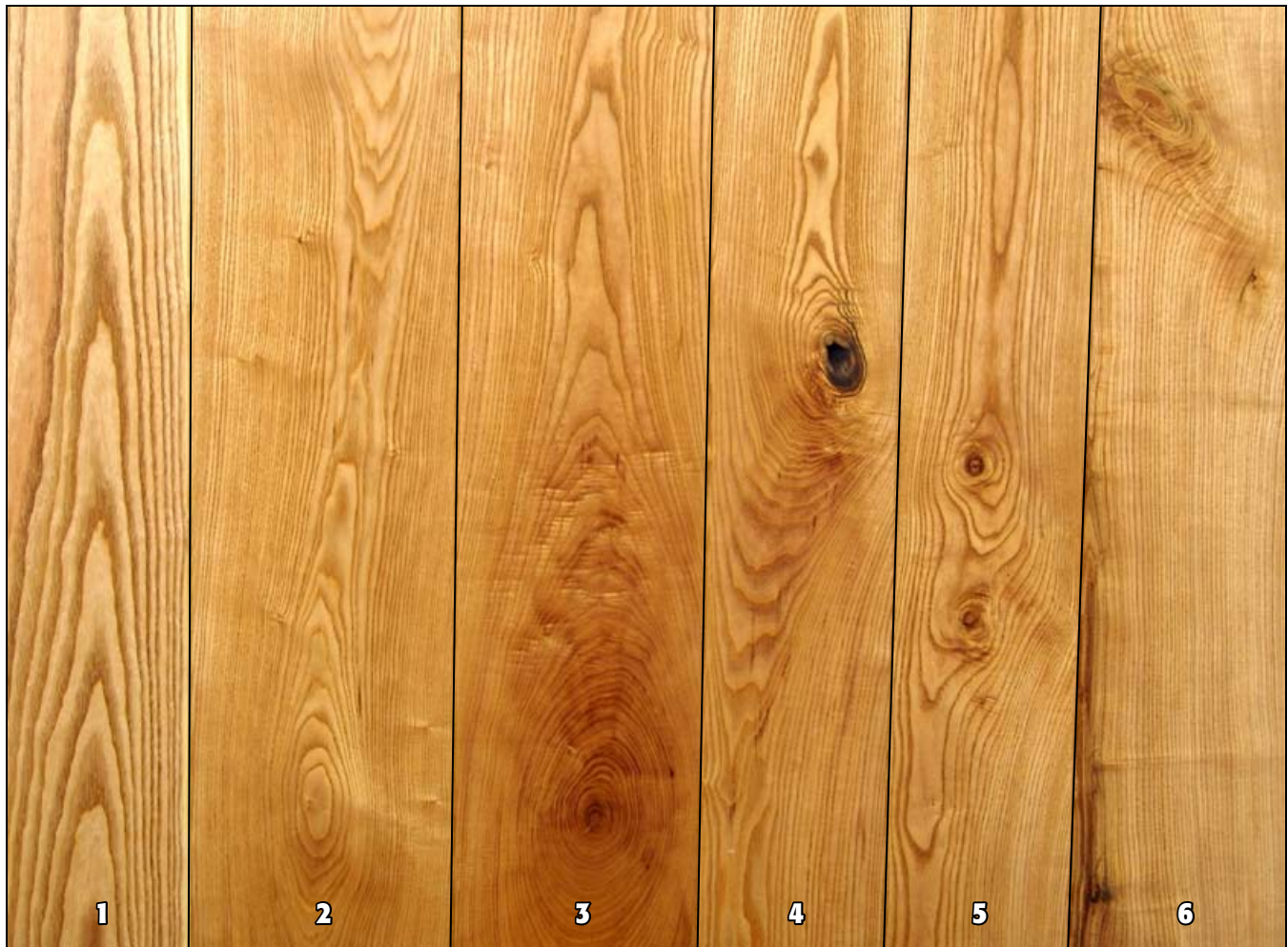
Commercial Use, Grading, and Value

Because the wood is strong and has some durability, it has been used for posts and railroad ties. However, it would be an ideal choice for relatively small runs of furniture, cabinets, and interior millwork, especially where it is important to have something different particularly with a coarse reddish grain pattern. The tree obtains a substantial size, thus good quality lumber can be produced.

Because of the limited supply of trees, the lumber is available only by chance or special order. A commercial wholesale market does not exist, and prices are not reported.



Range of the coffeetree



Chip Morrison

Kentucky coffeetree has a very wild, coarse grain pattern. In many boards, the growth rings tend to undulate or weave some. When used for wall paneling, this species produces the coarsest and wildest pattern of any of our hardwoods.

Boards 1 and 2 are characteristic of the species. Board 1 has a very characteristic “V” shaped pattern, while Board 2 is slower growth and more subdued. Board 2 shows several small pin knots.

Board 3 shows the undulating growth rings and small pin knots and a very large knot near the bottom. Boards 4 and 5 show characteristic open and tight knots. The tree has a large pith and stubby branches. This seems to result in open knots such as the one shown in Board 4.

Board 6 is quarter sawn and upon close examination, a small ray fleck will be evident. The large pith is seen at the bottom left of the piece.

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