



The WoodWord Son

# Wood Project Matrix

Best / Good / Avoid ratings for 10 common board species

A quick-reference guide to help you choose the right lumber faster. Use the tables to match your project type to the best wood species based on durability, workability, and typical use.

## Included project categories

- Small home decor
- Medium to large home decor
- Rustic home decor
- Rustic wooden gifts (men / women)
- Cutting boards
- Dining tables
- Cabinets, shelves, trim
- Toy projects
- Outdoor benches



## Included wood species

- Red Oak
- Aspen
- Rustic Alder
- Hickory
- Mahogany
- Maple
- Pine
- Cherry
- Walnut
- Poplar

## Project-based wood selection matrix

Rating key: Best = strong fit, Good = workable choice with tradeoffs, Avoid = usually the wrong choice.

Assumptions: Maple is rated as hard maple; Pine is rated as eastern white pine; Rustic Alder refers to knotty/character-grade alder.

### 1) Home decor and rustic gifts

Project	Red Oak	Aspen	Rustic Alder	Hickory	Mahogany	Maple	Pine	Cherry	Walnut	Poplar
Small home decor	Good	Good	Best	Good	Best	Best	Best	Best	Best	Good
Medium-large home decor	Best	Avoid	Good	Good	Best	Best	Good	Best	Best	Good
Rustic home decor	Best	Good	Best	Best	Good	Good	Best	Good	Good	Good
Rustic wooden gifts (men)	Best	Good	Best	Best	Good	Good	Good	Good	Best	Good
Rustic wooden gifts (women)	Best	Good	Best	Good	Good	Good	Good	Best	Best	Good

### 2) Kitchen, furniture, and built-ins

Project	Red Oak	Aspen	Rustic Alder	Hickory	Mahogany	Maple	Pine	Cherry	Walnut	Poplar
Cutting boards	Avoid	Avoid	Avoid	Good	Avoid	Best	Avoid	Good	Good	Avoid
Dining tables	Best	Avoid	Good	Best	Best	Best	Good	Best	Best	Good
Cabinets	Best	Good	Best	Best	Best	Best	Good	Best	Best	Best (paint)
Shelves	Best	Avoid	Good	Good	Best	Best	Good	Best	Best	Good
Trim (interior)	Best	Good	Best	Good	Best	Good	Best	Best	Good	Best (paint)

### 3) Toys and outdoor benches

Project	Red Oak	Aspen	Rustic Alder	Hickory	Mahogany	Maple	Pine	Cherry	Walnut	Poplar
Toy projects (indoor)	Good	Best	Good	Good	Good	Best	Good	Best	Good	Best

Outdoor benches	Avoid	Avoid	Avoid	Avoid	Best	Avoid	Good*	Good*	Good*	Avoid
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Outdoor notes: 'Good\*' assumes smart design plus a protective finish and regular maintenance. Mahogany is the strongest outdoor option on this list; most others are best kept indoors.

### Overlap summary (where species compete)

Premium furniture/cabinets/decor: Cherry, Walnut, Mahogany, Maple, Red Oak.

Rustic decor/gifts: Rustic Alder, Pine, Red Oak, Hickory.

Paint-grade and utility builds: Poplar, Aspen, Pine.

Tip: Wood varies by board, supplier, and finish. When appearance matters, test your finish on offcuts before committing.



## How to use this matrix

- Start with your project type (rows).
- Scan across the row and prioritize species marked Best.
- Use Good when you accept the tradeoffs (denting, movement, cost, or finishing quirks).
- Avoid ratings are there to save you time, money, and frustration.

## Quick tips

- Confirm what you actually bought: 'Maple' may be hard or soft maple; 'Pine' may be a soft pine or a hard pine.
- For food-contact items (cutting boards), use tight-grained hardwoods and a food-safe finish.
- For outdoor builds, prefer naturally durable species or use pressure-treated lumber and plan for maintenance.
- When staining, test on scraps first (some species blotch or take stain unevenly).

## Disclaimer

This guide is a practical starting point, not a substitute for local lumber advice or shop testing. Individual boards can vary in hardness, stability, and appearance. Always follow safe tool and finishing practices.

