

Imported Timber Species



Australia relies upon many species of imported timber in both structural and architectural applications. These timbers offer a range of properties and aesthetic qualities which lend themselves to a variety of applications such as heavy construction and domestic decking all the way through to fine joinery and craft.

This brochure covers a small range of timbers some more readily available than others in the Australian market place. Each is described along with normal applications and the most commonly needed Timber Properties including durability and hardness, which is normally assessed when considering a timber for use as a product such as flooring.

Meranti / Philippine Mahogany

Other common name Pacific Maple

Shorea spp.

Pacific Maple is a common trading name for a number of South East Asian light hardwoods marketed in Australia. Sometimes just called Maple, the individual species names are also used when identified. These species are; Lauan, Meranti and Seraya.

Species identification seems more determined by the area of supply than any botanical difference with the timber being called Meranti when coming from Malaysia, Seraya from Indonesia and Lauan from the Philippines.

This grouping of what could be called light to medium hardwoods grow in a wide range of terrains from just above sea level to moderately high mountainous areas and are fairly large trees reaching

average heights between 50 to 60 metres.

Meranti is by far the dominant specie in this *Shorea* timber grouping but all have similar properties. The main source of supply is Malaysia which exports the timber in four main groupings, Light Red (the most common), Dark Red, Yellow and White with considerable quantities also shipped mixed.

In Australia we normally have the two groups Light Red and Dark Red, with the names based more on wood density than on heartwood colour.

Timber Properties

- Density (average):
Light Red 500kg m³ dry
Dark Red 680kg m³ dry
- Durability: Class 4
- Strength Group:
Light Red SD7 dry
Dark Red SD6 dry
- Hardness Ratings (average):
Light Red 2.6kN dry
Dark Red 3.5kN dry

Light Red of the species are the more common, with the timber relatively easy to work. Heartwood is pale pink to mid red-brown, while the Sapwood is usually yellow, pink or grey and easily distinguished. Texture is course but even. Grain interlocked which may give a stripped or ribbon affect to the radial surface.

Dark Red, as the name implies is usually darker, being medium red to deep red-brown with the Sapwood not as easily identified, but it is the much higher density and uniformity of colour that sets it aside.

Philippine Mahogany is the other major trading name used for the *Shorea* species when sourced from the Philippines and

normally applies to the Lauan grouping, again using the differentiation of Light Red, Dark Red and White with similar Timber Properties applying; however they tend to be at the higher end of the average density ratings.

The sapwood of all the *Shorea* spp. are lyctid borer susceptible and should be correctly treated during the manufacturing process. It is an offence in New South Wales and Queensland to have available for sale any finishing timber which is not suitably treated and therefore rendering the timber safe from attack.



View of a typical well established plantation. Photo courtesy of the Malaysian Timber Council

All the timber, with one exception, works well particularly with hand tools however some adjustment to machine knives and saw blades may be necessary due to the variation in density and grain patterns when processing large or mixed volumes because of the slight differences in the

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individual species. The one exception is White Meranti, *Shorea bracteolata*, which contains an appreciable amount of silica. The silica does vary depending on the area of supply but usually causes major problems when sawing by quickly dulling the cutting edges and special knife blades would be needed when planning to obtain a satisfactory surface finish.

Most of the timber species finish well, although some exhibit a furry or woolly finish because of the interlocked grain which will usually be overcome with sanding. The wood glues well and takes nails and screws, although some localised tearing of the grain can occur when being cross cut and predrilling is recommended near the ends to avoid splitting.

The *Shorea* spp are used for most internal applications particularly for domestic finishing timber such as skirtings, architraves, door jambs, wall panelling and general joinery. The higher density material, usually the Dark Red, has long



Natural regrowth in a Sustainably managed forest. Photo courtesy of the Malaysian Timber Council

Shorea species guide		
Botanical Name	Common name	Heartwood Colour
<i>S. acuminata</i>	Light red meranti	pink to brown
<i>S. albida</i> *	Alan bunga or Meranti bunga	pink to red
<i>S.bracteolata</i>	White meranti	white to yellow
<i>S.macroptera</i>	Melanti	yellow to pink
<i>S.pauciflora</i>	Dark red meranti	red to brown
<i>S.resina-negra</i>	Yellow meranti	yellow to brown
<i>S.regosa</i> var. <i>uliginosa</i>	Meranti bakau	pink to brown

***Note:** There are two distinct supplies of *Shorea albida*, timber listed above refers to the lighter density material, while the higher density timber is called Alan batau or Meraka alan and is usually sold as Alan or Balau. For more information on Balau see the ATIF Imported Timber Species Guide 3.5.

been prized for staircase building, entrance doors and furniture and sometimes for window frames and sashes although this latter practice is now not recommended because of the low durability rating.

With a full range of sizes and many profiles widely available, the Meranti/ Pacific Maple/ Philippine Mahogany grouping of species are the most recognised and used finishing timbers throughout Australia.

In 1978 the Malaysian Government adopted the National Forestry Policy which was subsequently revised in 1993. The main objective of this revised policy is to conserve and manage the forest through sustainable management.

To secure these objectives the Government have set aside sufficient areas of land as a "Permanent Forest Estate", have provided legislation to enforce forestry law, established large plantations to supplement the harvesting of sustained natural forests and have implemented a managed harvesting

program which aids natural regeneration and encourages private sector involvement.

Given these environmental practices are now well established, with forest stewardship and timber certification being a prerequisite for Asian Exporters, the long term availability seems assured and therefore this very popular timber grouping should continue to dominate the Australian domestic finishing timber market.

Further Reading

This is one Guide in a series of Imported Timber Species Guides numbered 3.1 to 3.9, the complete series is available from your local Timber Advisory Service or by downloading from the Technical Bulletin section of www.timber.net.au

- Wood in Australia – Keith R Bootle published by McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Selecting Timber – a publication of BRANZ.

For further information on this brochure, contact the Timber Advisory Service on free call 1800 044 529 or email showroom@tdansw.asn.au Level 6, 525 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010. General Information on the use of timber can also be found at the web page www.timber.net.au



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