

Drying Your Lumber

So we've sawed your logs and left you with a pile of wonderful wood. Now comes the most important part of the treecycling process—drying your lumber for future use with a minimum of checking, warping and staining.

It's important to act fast. If your fresh sawn lumber lies "dead stacked" (lying face to face) too long, you risk it being stained by fungi and bacteria. It's also important that the lumber be adequately end sealed before checking (splitting) begins. Getting it stacked flat, with weight on top helps keep it from warping, bowing or cupping.

If you plan to have your lumber kiln dried, it would be best to take it to the kiln immediately. We recommend Jorgensen-Bennett Manufacturing Company at 1230 North Seventh Street. Their number is 527-8646. We were most recently quoted \$150 to sticker, stack and kiln dry 1000 board feet of White Oak. Prices may vary by species and thickness.

If you choose to air dry your own lumber, you will want to stack it immediately after sawing. The stack should be built to allow air to circulate around each board, keep the stack off the ground and keep the sun and rain off the lumber.

An open shed is an ideal place for the stack but you can stack it anywhere so long as it is protected from direct sun.

Starting from the ground up, make a solid base with cement blocks and 4" beams on top, spaced about 16" apart so they will be perpendicular to your boards and accommodate the full length of your boards without overhang.

On top of the beams, which must be level with each other, lay your first course of stickers. Stickers are used to separate the boards from each other and allow for air circulation. They should be made from dry wood and must all be the same thickness, around $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

Next, lay your first layer of boards. It is easiest to stack your lumber if the boards are all the same length and thickness. Otherwise, stacking will take careful planning, because the entire stack should be rectangular, with spacing between the boards as consistent as possible to promote even air circulation.

On each layer, the boards must all be the same thickness, and they must line up at the ends without overhanging. Shorter boards should be staggered so the ends on the interior of the stack don't line up. This reduces large open spaces and promotes slow, even drying.

Each successive layer of stickers must line up vertically with the previous layer of stickers, otherwise you will end up with bowed or cupped boards.

Continue this process until your pile is complete and then add a final course of stickers and add a cover of old boards, plywood, etc. to protect the pile from sun and rain. This cover should extend over the edges of the stack if your stack isn't already sheltered. Weigh the stack down with bricks or other heavy items to reduce the possibility of warping. To slow down the rate of moisture loss and minimize end checking, coat the exposed ends of each board with several coats of latex paint or, better yet, a wax based end-sealer such as Anchor Seal or Bailey's Seal.

Once your stack is finished, simply wait for it to dry. While the general rule of thumb is one year of drying for every inch of thickness, the species you are drying, weather conditions and the time of year you begin drying can influence this significantly. No published times can adequately compensate for the huge variations in drying rates, so unless you are in a rush, plan your lumber drying carefully to allow adequate time.



Don't trash that tree... Treecycle!

Custom Sawing & Urban Wood Recovery
Fine Furniture, Cabinetry & Millwork

Scott Banbury
901-619-8567

1750 Chelsea Avenue
Memphis, TN 38108
sbanbury@midsoouth.com
www.scottbanbury.com

Air drying your lumber outdoors won't get you down to the ideal moisture content to successfully use your lumber indoors. Wood used inside a Memphis home should range around 7 to 10 percent moisture content. Air drying outdoors only allows the lumber to reach its equilibrium moisture content (EMC) with the surrounding air, which in Memphis is typically between 12 to 14 percent. While air-dried lumber can be used as-is with adequate consideration for shrinkage, you will be better off drying it indoors before using it.

To dry your lumber indoors, use essentially the same stacking technique. It is important to stack the lumber in a dry area where there is air circulation.

Finishing the drying process indoors will take from several weeks to a couple of months, depending on conditions in your home and the moisture content you are starting with. You don't need to dry all your lumber indoors at once. If you plan your projects properly, you can dry enough in small batches to satisfy your project-making goals. To be certain the lumber is dry enough, check the moisture content before using it.

Of course, we would be happy to build your air drying stack, or deliver your wood to the kiln, for you at a rate of \$40 per hour plus materials.

If you have any questions, feel free to call us at 726-1473 or email sbanbury@midsouth.rr.com.

