

Tip #127 Understanding Lumber Grades

What Is The Meaning Of All Those Grading Letters And Numbers On Wood?

Here you go:

GRADES FOR HARDWOOD LUMBER

FIRSTS: The best wood available for fine furniture and cabinet work. 8' to 16' long First grade boards must be 6" or more in width and be 91-2/3 percent or more clear and free of defects on BOTH SIDES.

SECONDS: Very good choice for the large majority of furniture and cabinet work. 8' to 16' long Second grade boards must be 6" or more in width and be 83-1/3 percent or more clear and free of defects on BOTH SIDES.

SELECTS: Select lumber is a good choice for the majority of cabinet-making applications. Boards must be 6' to 16' long, 4" or more in width It must be 91-2/3 percent or more clear and free of defects on ONE SIDE ONLY and therefore, some waste can be expected.

NO. 1 COMMON: A good choice for less-critical cabinet-making and similar interior applications, No. 1 common lumber must be 4' to 16' long, 3" or more in width and only 66-2/3 percent or more clear and free of defects on ONE SIDE ONLY. Some waste is to be expected.

NO. 2 COMMON: Acceptable for flooring, paneling and similar less-critical projects such as those that will be filled and painted. No. 2 common lumber must be 4' to 16' long, 3" or more in width and need be only 50 percent or more clear and free of defects on ONE SIDE ONLY. Significant waste is to be expected.

NO. 3-A COMMON: Acceptable for less-critical projects. No. 3-A common lumber must be 4' to 16' long, 3" or more in width and need be only 33-1/3 percent or more clear and free of defects on ONE SIDE ONLY. More waste than usable stock is to be expected.

NO. 3-B COMMON: Acceptable for few projects. No. 3-B common lumber must be 4' to 16' long, 3" or more in width and need be only 25 percent or more clear and free of defects on ONE SIDE ONLY. More waste than usable stock is to be expected.

GRADES FOR SOFTWOOD LUMBER

A: (Also often referred to as No. 1 Clear or #1 Clear) Completely free of defects on both sides. Well-suited for projects requiring a natural finish.

B: (Also referred to as No. 2 Clear or #2 Clear) May contain a few blemishes and/or small defects. Well-suited for projects requiring a natural finish.

C: May contain a limited number of blemishes and/or small defects that can be filled and painted. In a limited number of cases, some Grade C lumber may even be suitable for projects requiring a natural finish.

D: May contain any number of blemishes and/or defects that can be filled and painted without taking away from the final appearance of the project.

NO. 1 COMMON: A good choice for less-critical cabinet-making and similar interior applications, No. 1 common lumber must be only 66-2/3 percent or more clear and free of defects on ONE SIDE ONLY. Some waste is to be expected.

NO. 2 COMMON: Acceptable for flooring, paneling and similar less-critical projects such as those that will be filled and painted. Must be only 50 percent or more clear and free of defects on ONE SIDE ONLY. Significant waste is to be expected.

PLYWOOD GRADES

Plywoods are graded using a double letter designation such as A-A, A-D, etc. The first of these two letters designates the front or “face” side of the sheet, while the second letter designates the back side of the sheet. Here is a description of each letter designation:

N: Made of selected, furniture or cabinet quality, all heartwood or all sapwood veneers. Intended for a natural, as opposed to painted finish. Free of all open defects with some repairs allowed.

A: A smooth surface which may contain some neatly-made repairs such as “footballs” and similar plugs. May be painted or in some cases, used with a natural finish in applications which may be less demanding.

B: Made with a solid surface veneer which may contain “footballs” and similar repair plugs, as well as un-repaired, tight knots. Best used for projects that are intended to be painted.

C: May contain sanding defects, as long as they do not negatively affect the serviceability or strength of the panel. Under certain circumstances, splits to 1/2" long and knotholes up to 1-1/2" are permitted.

D: This is the lowest grade plywood, typically used only for interior applications such as cabinet-backs and similar inner panels that will not be readily visible. D grade plywood may contain limited splits plus knots or knotholes up to 2-1/2" in maximum dimension and up to 1/2" larger in some cases.