

TECHNICAL NOTE NUMBER 162

FOREST PRODUCTS LABORATORY - U. S. FOREST SERVICE - MADISON, WISCONSIN

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF MAHOGANY

Only true mahogany from tropical America, "African mahogany", and "Philippine mahogany" are commonly sold as mahogany in this country, but at various times over 60 different species of timber have been sold under that name. Although all of these species resemble each other in varying degrees, tropical American mahogany and "African mahogany" possess one important characteristic in common. This is the occurrence of dark amber-colored gum in many of the pores. The gum does not fill the pores but is recognized as dark specks or streaks in the pores as seen on end or side grain. This gum is barely visible to the naked eye, but is easily seen through a hand lens with a magnification of 10-15 diameters. In preparing the end grain of the wood for examination, a very sharp knife should be used to make a smooth cut.

Some other woods have similar dark masses of gum in the pores, but none of these are commonly substituted for mahogany. Among them are crabwood and sapeli, species imported from South America in small quantities only, and the Cedrelas (Spanish cedar, etc.), which are rarely sold as mahoganies, and are easily recognized by their odor.

True mahogany has fine, continuous, concentric lines on the cross section usually from 1/8 to 1/2 inch apart, which distinguish it from "African mahogany" in which these lines never occur.

"Philippine mahogany", although not marked by the black masses of gum, is distinguished from true mahogany and other so-called mahoganies by the presence of fine, white, tangential lines 1/8 inch to several inches apart, readily visible to the naked eye, and showing under a lens as rows of small openings filled with a white substance.

A more complete key and description of mahogany and so-called mahogany, which describes common species in detail, may be obtained from the Forest Products Laboratory.