

Black locust

Black locust, (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), is a deciduous tree native to the southeastern United States that has been planted elsewhere in the US and in other countries with similar climates. It is generally considered a weed tree and even categorized as an invasive species in some areas, based on its growing habits and ability to displace natives. There are no large-scale commercial applications for black locust, but because of its superior hardness, rot resistance, and ability to regenerate quickly, it is commonly used by landowners for fence posts and firewood. Those characteristics, along with its rich yellow color and often gnarled branching, also make black locust a prized wood for flooring, decking, outdoor furniture, garden structures, and other exterior applications. In the past, black locust had been used for fence posts and shipbuilding.

Black locust and WholeTrees®

WholeTrees uses black locust in both structural and decorative applications for many reasons, including:

- Use of an invasive species as part of its commitment to sustainability
- Superior rot resistance, especially valuable in outdoor applications
- Incredible strength properties
- Aesthetic sculptural qualities of branches
- Accessibility in the company's home state of Wisconsin

WholeTrees has been using black locust for more than 15 years. Our standard treatment method is to hand-peel the outer bark; apply a natural borate product (such as Tim-bor) to help control pests, fungus, and mold; sanding to a 60 grit level within adult reach, and finally finished. We have several finishes available to both seal and stain the prepared wood surface. WholeTrees can provide information to the client to match their design preferences. Regardless of finish selection, WholeTrees recommends following the manufacturers instructions for maintenance.



Figure 1. A Black locust tree walk with a hemp-oil based finish, two months after initial application.

We believe that the black locust wood will last more than 75 years untreated in exterior structures. We give it a 50 year definitive lifespan and indefinite when treated. WholeTrees will provides a 20 year warranty on all of our exterior black locust structures.

Regardless of finish selection, WholeTrees recommends following manufacturer's instructions for maintenance. WholeTrees advises cleaning the structure and reapplying finish, every 1-5 years depending on conditions.

Black Locust Appearance Over Time

Freshly peeled black locust is a light “blond” color. The wood is also known to develop black specks or streaks from contact with higher environmental humidity conditions. Occasional black ‘blooms’ occur in extremely moist and shady locations. These surface-level effects may be considered unappealing and do not impact the integrity of the wood. Though exact reasons are not clear, black locust experts theorize this to be a result of natural disease-resistant components of the wood (flavenoids) interacting with the finish in higher humidity conditions. Please contact WholeTrees for help if a diagnosis is necessary, and then an appropriate treatment plan can be developed to treat the surface.



Figure 2. Black locust with a tinted finish, approx. two years after initial application.



Figure 3. A Black locust tree slice with oiled finish at initial application.



Figure 4. Black locust solar carport with a linseed based finish, approx. one month after initial application.