

LIGNUM-VITAE - Guaiacum officinale.

There are 4 main species of Guaiacum but G. officinale probably most important.

Common Names: Lignum-vitae.  
Guayacan.  
Guaiacum-wood.  
Holy Wood.  
Wood of Life.

Habitat:

Tropical America, Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Jamaica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico - or. briefly:

West Indies and North coast of Venezuela and Colombia.

Wood:

Has been in use since 1508. Very heavy - 88lbs/cu.ft; very hard and has a natural resin or oil; heartwood greenish-black darkening on exposure to light and air.

Uses:

1. Bushings for stern tubes of propellor-driven ships. - "owing to the silky nature of the wood and the oil contained in it acting in conjunction with the water, a natural lubricant is formed." Bushings last 3-7 years depending on speed of ship - 3 years in the Mauretania.
2. Sheaves for blocks - have lasted up to 70 years and still O.K.
3. Saw packings.
4. Mallets.
5. Caster wheels.
6. Bowling balls.
7. Masthead trucks.
8. Stencil and chisel blocks.
9. Cable dressers.
10. Turned novelties.

"Steel and tube mills are using Lignum-vitae in increasing amounts to replace brass and babbitt-metal for bearings in roller mills and pumps, as the initial cost is less than metal and

lubrication is unnecessary." (Record & Hess).

Marketing:

The timber enters the market in bolts or logs 2-10 ft. long and 3"-20" in diameter.

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References.

Timbers of the New World - Record & Hess, 1943.

A Manual of the Timbers of the World - Howard, 1951.

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