



Common Name: Lignum Vitae

Argentine Lignum Vitae is . . . well, not exactly Lignum Vitae.

Allow us to explain. The wood popularly known as "Lignum Vitae" is, in fact, technically called "Genuine Lignum Vitae" (*Guaiacum officinale*). Genuine Lignum Vitae is quite famous for being "the densest wood in the world" — it ranks atop the "Janka Scale of Hardness," which measures such things. The wood is also believed to have medicinal properties in its resins and chips; "Lignum Vitae" is, after all, Latin for "Wood of Life."



Unfortunately, because of Genuine Lignum Vitae's highly desirable properties, the wood has been grossly overharvested and is now practically on the endangered species list (which, of course, is sadly ironic, considering the meaning of its name). Although some Genuine Lignum Vitae is still available on the market, it is no longer being sold in any significant quantities.

And that's where Argentine Lignum Vitae (*Bulnesia sarmientoi*) comes in. Although it's not genetically related to

Genuine Lignum Vitae, it has become widely used as a substitute wood due to its similar appearance and characteristics to the "genuine" article (i.e., it's extremely hard, heavy, dense, strong, and durable). With an average specific gravity of about 1.10, the wood will sink in water. Because of its incredible density and strength, Argentine Lignum Vitae is often applied in making the business end of mallets and clubs.

The wood also makes for excellent handles, as well as a variety of other turnings and carvings. Despite its great density, Argentine Lignum Vitae actually cuts fairly easily due to its natural oils. It also polishes well.

Argentine Lignum Vitae's heartwood varies from shades of green to brown to black, and is streaked. Its sapwood tends to be thin and light yellow. *Bulnesia sarmientoi* trees grow primarily around the border region of Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay. The wood is known locally as "Palo Santo" ("Sainted Wood" in Spanish), possibly because its bark is sometimes used to make a tea to treat stomach ailments.

Argentine Lignum Vitae is related to, but not the same as, Verawood (*Bulnesia Arborea*).