

# Useful Guidelines

for buying timber



**SILVA**   
TIMBER PRODUCTS

## Essential tips for buying, storing, installing and maintaining timber



On the face of it timber appears to be a relatively simple material and because of this it is often tempting to gloss over the technical aspect. It can however be of great benefit to the buyer to gain an understanding of the terminology, the different grading systems and a general overview of how the industry operates.

This document is intended as a brief guide only, to point you in the right direction and make you aware of some of the main issues that you will need to consider, especially if you are not a regular buyer and user of timber. More in depth information on most of the topics covered here is available on our website.

Here at Silva Timber we are committed to helping you source the right product for your project. We are proud of the fact that our website contains more product photographs and in depth technical information than any other timber website in the UK. Whether you are an architect designing a commercial building, a self-builder designing your dream home, or a garden designer planning a deck project, we are sure that you will find invaluable information at Silva.

# The Decision Making Process

The first decisions you'll need to make are what to buy and where to buy it from. Once you start to shop around you will find that different suppliers may offer the same product specification, however it is important to look closely at both the specification and the material itself. Firstly ensure that the specifications are like for like. Some points you may want to check include:

## **Is the product air dried or kiln dried?**

Kiln dried wood has a number of advantages over air dried or non-dried (green) wood. Kiln drying results in evenly dried timber with consistent moisture content throughout the pack. There is no need to acclimatise kiln dried wood on site, it can be finished and installed immediately. Kiln dried wood experiences minimal movement and shrinkage and will have a superior finish when machined into profiles. Click [here](#) to read more about the benefits of using kiln dried wood.

## **Is the quoted material 100% on grade or does it contain a percentage of a lower grade material?**

It is common particularly with sawn grades of Western Red Cedar to offer a higher grade with a percentage of a lower grade mixed in. For example, some suppliers offer No. 2 Clear & Better with a percentage of lower grade No. 4 Clear & Better mixed in. In most cases the supplier will disclose this on the quote, but to the uninitiated it is easy to misunderstand what this means. At Silva we keep grades separate, so if you buy a particular grade you receive only that grade, unless you specify otherwise.

Ensure that suppliers are using the correct grading terminology. You may see Western Red Cedar described simply as 'Clear' or 'Clear Grade' however this is not actually a grade so could be subject to a wide variation in consistency and quality. Suppliers should be able to detail which NLGA or R-List grade their Western Red Cedar adheres to and be happy to provide this information. This relates to any timber you may be purchasing.

## **Don't base your decision solely on hand samples**

Hand samples have very limited use in assessing the overall quality of the product you are buying. Only by looking at a larger amount of the material you are buying can you gain a full understanding of the overall appearance of the product. Silva endeavours to show representative images of the different products and grades on our website, but even this is no substitute for seeing the product before you buy.

## **If possible look at the material that you are buying**

The source of the raw material will have some bearing on the quality of the end product. Different manufacturing mills have different quality standards, with some focusing on producing a high quality and more consistent product whilst others focus more on keeping the price low. The latter are more likely to make sacrifices by pushing the lower boundaries of the grades. In some cases, even the growing region has an influence on the quality of the end product. Although products may be described with the same grade name, they can be markedly different, therefore if possible always view the product you are buying.



# Timber Grading

## How is it graded?

A timber grade is a minimum standard describing the extent and limitations of the characteristics permitted in a piece of timber having regard to the end use for which the grade is intended. Since no two pieces of timber are the same, complete uniformity in grades or shipments is impossible. Some of the pieces that fall within the grade will have fewer of the permitted characteristics and will therefore be at the upper level of the grade. On other pieces more of the permitted characteristics will be present and therefore will be at the lower level of the grade.

More detailed information about the grading classifications can be obtained from our website or by requesting information from our customer support team.

## Colour variation

Wood is a natural product which will vary in colour from piece to piece. Grading rules do not cover colour variation; therefore you should expect to receive pieces with a range of colour tones.



## Identify the right grade for your project

Some of our products are available in different grades, so it is important to identify the grade that is suitable for your project. The choice of grade is usually dictated by the desired finished look of the building / structure and the budget. For example, with Western Red Cedar cladding, we offer a high quality grade called 'Clear Vertical Grain (CVG).' It contains virtually no knots or natural imperfections of any kind and is selected for the direction of the grain. At the other end of the scale we have Select Tight Knot (STK) grade cedar cladding, which as the name suggests features knots and other natural characteristics. There is obviously a significant price difference between the two grades however, they both give a completely different look and it may be the case that budget aside, the knotty grade gives you the look you want to achieve on your particular project. It should be pointed out that there are other grades of Western Red Cedar in between CVG and STK that will suit many projects.

If you are working to a tight budget then why not consider using a higher grade on the most visible areas of the project and a more economical grade on the less visible. Look at the grade of timber that you are buying so that you know what to expect!

## What lengths do Silva supply?

Many timber companies will only supply products like cladding in random lengths, however Silva differs in that we sell in specific lengths, so we offer whatever we have available at the time. This provides benefit to the customer as it allows the selection of the optimum board lengths for the project. Silva holds large stocks of most products and we endeavour to be able to offer a good range of lengths in any one product at any time.

## Silva Timber's Policy on Quality

Our company philosophy has always been to source our products primarily on quality rather than price. With most things in life when you opt for the cheapest there is usually a sacrifice to be made on quality, and timber is no exception to this rule. What can initially seem like a good deal can end up costing more in the long term in wastage and increased labour costs, and without sufficient research you may not even receive what you expect. With Silva Timber you can be assured of receiving quality and value.

### Quality suppliers

Silva Timber sources its suppliers very carefully to meet certain quality and service criteria. We have formed long term relationships with reputable suppliers – many of which we have dealt with for over a decade - because they provide us with products that are of a consistently high quality from one shipment to the next.

Our products often exceed standards set by industry grading rules, for example our clear vertical grain Western Red Cedar cladding contains virtually no knots or natural characteristics, despite the fact that occasional pin knots are permitted within the grade. This particular product comes from the leading re-manufacturer of Western Red Cedar products in North America with whom we have an exclusive relationship.

Our Western Red Cedar shingles and shakes are never 'off-grade' because the producer we've bought from for the past eight years is one of the most reputable in the industry. When Philadelphia's Independence Hall – site of the signing of the declaration of independence – was restored recently, our supplier was chosen to provide to roof shakes.



### What to expect from a natural wood product

The inherent beauty of wood as a building material lies in its unique appearance from piece to piece – a feat impossible to achieve with man-made substrates such as cement fibre, brick, metal and uPVC.

Take into consideration that wood is an entirely natural product and therefore in any one shipment every piece will have some difference to the next piece. It is important that the user understands that a limited presence of these natural characteristics is permitted within the grading rules and factored into the price of the product. It is inevitable that there will be differences in colour tone and grain and within any one shipment there will be a small number of pieces that contain minor visible natural characteristics such as checks, shakes, splits, raised grain, slight bowing etc.

Our pickers will remove boards with serious defects or damage that cannot be installed; however the user must accept a minimal amount of 'fall down' or wastage in the form of the aforementioned characteristics. In most instances an installer will absorb less desirable material into the saw waste allowance by trimming it down when shorter pieces are required. A saw waste allowance should be factored in when ordering to allow for off-cuts at the end of courses / around windows etc. The saw waste allowance will vary depending on the complexity of the project, but you should normally allow between 5 and 15% with 10% being the norm.

# How to look after you timber before, during and after installation

## Storing your timber on site

When your timber is delivered it should be stacked flat onto bearers laid on a hard surface, not laid directly on the ground. It should then be protected from the elements with a weatherproof cover. Ideally the protective cover should be breathable, especially if the timber is to remain there for some time prior to installation.

## Sticker marks

Cladding, decking and other timber products are produced by sawing logs into timbers, then re-sawing into boards or blanks. Boards are then stacked and dried (or left green in some cases), then machined into profiles. Profiled (deck or cladding) boards are then restacked with sticks (called stickers) in between some or all of the layers to allow air to flow throughout the pack, and to give the pack more stability.

With some products slight evidence of the stickers will be left on the face of the board – they are called sticker marks and it is unavoidable. It can however easily be removed by lightly sanding (which is recommended regardless of the presence of sticker stain if you are applying a finish).

## Installation

Take the time to familiarise yourself with standard industry methods of installation. You can download installation manuals from our website. Always ensure that you use the correct fasteners – in most cases the use of stainless steel nails or screws is recommended.

Please see [www.silvatimber.co.uk](http://www.silvatimber.co.uk) for recommended screw / nail types for each particular product or talk to one of our sales advisors if in doubt.

## Finishing

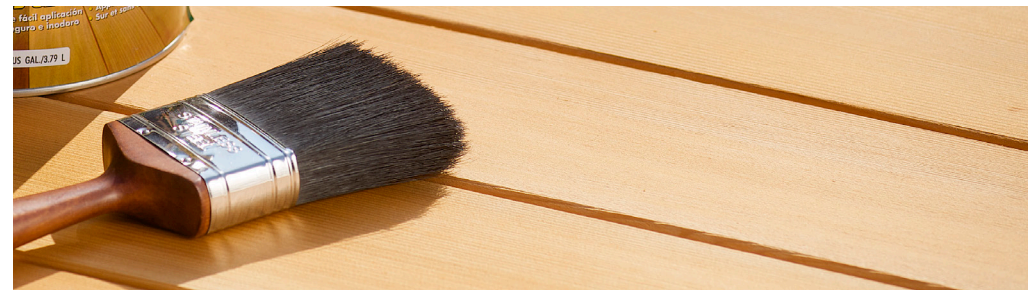
It is recommended that a suitable finish be applied to all surfaces, including ends, before installation. The type of coating will be determined by the final finish and look selected. The finish protects the wood from moisture absorption and UV degradation. It helps prevent staining caused by mildew and extractives and will increase the service life of the timber. Sanding the boards prior to coating is also recommended for the optimal finish adhesion.

Silva Timber supplies a range of high quality wood finishes which can either be supplied for application on site or timber can be factory coated on all sides prior to delivery.

## Maintaining

All wood products used in exterior applications require a degree of maintenance to keep them looking their best. Even if the choice is made not to apply a finish to your exterior wood surface, contaminants such as dirt and mildew should be regularly removed to maintain its beautiful, natural appearance.

Silva offers a wide range of maintenance products for cleaning, removing old finishes and removing weathering from exterior wood surfaces.



# Silva Timber's Goal

At Silva Timber our aim is to equip our customers with knowledge to enable them to make an informed decision. What we really want is for you to select the right product for your project because we want you to be happy with your purchase and hopefully buy from us again in the future. We don't want you to buy a more economical grade that you are unhappy with, but then we don't want you to spend more than you have to either. Our goal is to leave you feeling that you've received good value for money and excellent customer service.



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