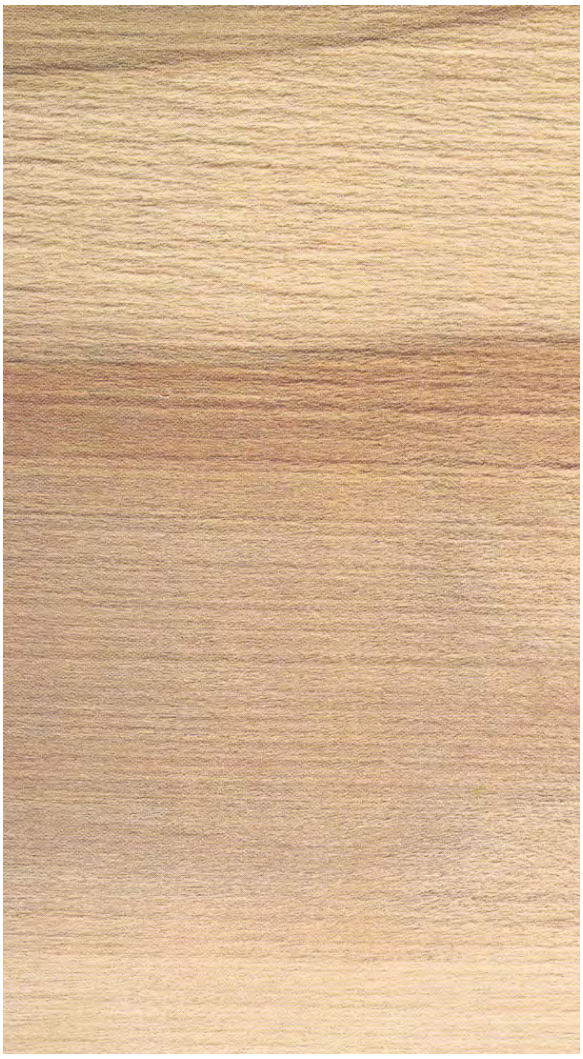
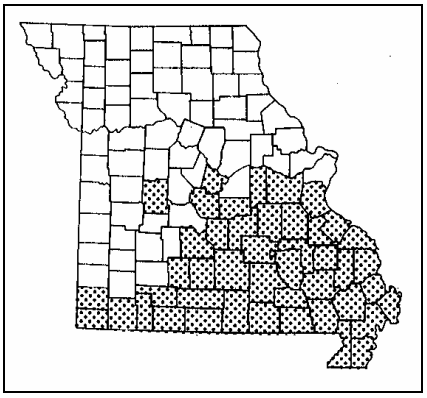
Blackgum

Nyssa sylvatica Marsh.

A tree native to the Ozarks and the Bootheel area of Missouri, it may also be called tupelo, sourgum, tupelo gum or pepperidge. In fact, upland blackgum is harder and heavier than its bottomland relatives. It is one of the first trees in the Ozarks to color in the fall; the leaves turn a deep bright red. It grows on both upland and lowland sites, but reaches better size and form on deeper or rich soils.

The wood is nearly white in sapwood, sometimes with yellowish or brownish streaks in the heartwood. The bark is reddish brown, almost black, deeply fissured into irregular and block-shaped ridges. The grain is interlocked and the wood is diffuse porous. There may be almost no color difference between sapwood and heartwood, causing growth rings to be difficult to see, resulting in wood with little character. Its texture is fine and uniform, but it is difficult to dry without considerable warp and twist. The wood is very difficult to split, average to below average in machining characteristics, and below average in steam bending. It is not durable when exposed to conditions favoring decay.

A tough wood, it has been used for pallets and boxes, mouldings, furniture parts and railroad ties. The lumber is generally of common grade and mixed in with low grade hardwood lumber in the market. It also has been used as pulpwood for paper making and many other uses in the past, but it seems less in demand today. The wood is of questionable value for home workshops considering the variety of other woods that are available.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