



Wood Type:
Hardwood

Durability:
Moderately durable

Treatability:
Difficult

Moisture Movement:
Medium

Density (mean, Kg/m³):
640

Texture:
Medium

Availability:
Available at specialist
timber merchant

Chemical Properties:
Occasional deposits of
stone may occur

Use(s):
Joinery - Exterior, Joinery
- Interior, Furniture,
Flooring

Colour(s):
Pink/pale red (Freshly
cut), Reddish brown
(Typical mahogany
colour)

Environmental

Listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as as VU – Vulnerable: at risk of extinction. Not listed in CITES. Believed available from well-managed sources. Check certification status with suppliers.

Distribution

C. excelsa has a wide distribution in tropical Africa, from Sierra Leone in the west, to Tanzania in the east. *C. regia* is confined to West Africa, where it occurs from Senegal to Ghana. There does not appear to be any significant difference between the timber of the two species.

The Tree

A very large tree with cylindrical bole and small or no buttresses. Grows to a height of 45m or more, and a diameter at breast height of 10m or slightly more.

The Timber

The sapwood is pale yellow or whitish, the heartwood pinkish when freshly cut, darkening to typical mahogany colour of reddish-brown. Sapele is characterised by a marked and regular stripe, particularly pronounced on quarter-sawn surfaces. Occasionally mottle figure is present, it is fairly close textured, and the grain is interlocked. It is harder and heavier than African mahogany, weighing about 640 kg/m³ when dried. It has a pronounced cedar-like scent when freshly cut.

Drying

The timber dries rapidly with a marked tendency to distort. Quarter-sawn material is less liable to degrade in drying.

Strength

Sapele is much harder than African or American mahogany, and in resistance to indentation, bending strength, stiffness, and resistance to shock loads, is practically equal with English oak.

Working qualities

Medium - Works fairly well with hand and machine tools, but the inter-locked grain is often troublesome in planing and moulding, and a reduction of cutting angle to 15° is needed to obtain a good finish. It takes screws and nails well, glues satisfactorily, stains readily, and takes an excellent polish.