

PAMPHLET

01

WOOD NAMES AND DESIGNATIONS

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The names and designations given to tropical woods are regularly a source of controversy and even dispute. It is therefore important for these names to be precise, so that each one can be associated with a single species or group of species of wood without any risk of confusion.

There are three types of names:

- pilot names,
- botanical names, also known as scientific names,
- common names.

1. PILOT NAMES

The pilot names of tropical woods are those mentioned in the latest version of the *General Nomenclature of Tropical Timber*¹ published by the International Tropical Timber Technical Association (ATIBT, 2016)².

This reference work is used to update the *Harmonized System Code*³ of the World Customs Organization. It is internationally recognised. Each pilot name used in this book generally corresponds to the vernacular name most commonly used to market a wood, a name adopted either by the main exporting country or by the main importing country.

A pilot name designates a species of wood; each species corresponds either to a single botanical

species, or to a group of several species, most often of the same botanical genus, or more rarely of several botanical genera. The woods of species covered by the same pilot name have similar technological properties, enabling them to be marketed as a group.

Of the 582 pilot names described in the *General Nomenclature of Tropical Timber*, more than half (297) are associated with a single botanical species.

A second trade name is sometimes used for certain species, and may be associated with the pilot name, as mentioned for example in the *Tropical Timber Atlas*⁴ (2016).

1. <https://www.atibt.org/files/upload/Nomenclature-Generale-des-Bois-Tropicaux-7eme-edition.pdf>

2. European standard EN 13556 (December 2003) *Round and sawn timber - Nomenclature of timbers used in Europe* establishes the list of hardwoods and softwoods used in Europe, temperate woods and tropical woods. Although this standard is still in force in 2023, a number of correspondences between the pilot name and the botanical name are no longer up to date. As a result, this standard cannot be used as a reference.

3. <https://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/nomenclature/overview/what-is-the-harmonized-system.aspx>

4. https://www.itto.int/files/itto_project_db_input/3028/Technical/E-TMT-SDP-010-12-R1-M-Tropical%20Timber%20Atlas.pdf
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2. BOTANICAL NAMES



Congo © Imageo

The botanical name of a wood is associated with a single botanical species. It is usually made up of two terms, the genus name and the species name. The term species designates both a given botanical species and the second part of its botanical name, which can lead to confusion.

In the event of a dispute, the botanical name is the reference to be taken into account.

In the *General Nomenclature of Tropical Timber*, the botanical names of the woods are given, together with the pilot names of the corresponding species.

Some botanical names do not consist of the pair <Genus species> but of the genus name combined with the following abbreviations:

- spp. (*species pluralis* in Latin): according to botanical codes, this abbreviation means “more than one species of the genus” and may include all the species of the genus, which can lead to confusion; in fact, depending on the author, this abbreviation is used either to designate several species of the same genus in a non-exhaustive way, or to designate all the species of the genus.
- p.p. (*pro parte* in Latin): this abbreviation is used for wood species grouping together several species of the same genus, without all the species of this genus being concerned; it is preferred to the abbreviation spp. because it is more restrictive⁵.
- subgen. (subgenus): within a given genus, several species with a high degree of botanical similarity may be grouped together in a subgenus; within a subgenus, the species may correspond to all the species or to several species not listed exhaustively, or to some of them, according to the same rules as those set out above.

The botanical names of tropical woods are subject to periodic taxonomic evolution. As a result, a botanical name may sometimes be associated with one or more synonyms. The current botanical names are available on the following three websites⁶:

- <https://www.tropicos.org/home> (Missouri Botanical Garden website)
- <https://www.ipni.org/> (*International Plant Names Index*: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Harvard University Herbaria & Libraries, Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research)
- <https://wfo.plantlist.org/plant-list> (World Flora Online)

5. It is very often preferable not to associate a pilot name with all the species in the corresponding genus, and therefore to use the name Genus p.p. rather than Genus spp.

Within a given botanical genus, it is possible, and even common, for certain species, sometimes very rare in their area of distribution, to be of no commercial interest and to produce wood of no technological interest, or whose technological performance is not what is expected for the corresponding species.

Ipê (botanical genus *Handroanthus*) is a typical example. Some species in the genus produce wood that is much less dense and less durable than can be expected from this species; these woods cannot therefore be associated with the pilot name Ipê, whose botanical name should be *Handroanthus* p.p.

6. It should be noted that the botanical names of certain woods on these three sites are not always consistent, as Systematics is not a totally exact science...

3. COMMON NAMES

The pilot name of a species is very often associated with one or more **common names**, also known as *local*, *vernacular*, *colloquial* or even *vulgar names*.

These common names are used locally, usually in the production regions, and can vary from one sub-region to another, or even from one site to another.

Some of them are simply phonetic transcriptions of very local names that are based solely on the spoken language. As a result, their spelling can be very approximate.

These common names are regularly used in the international tropical timber trade, but sometimes inappropriately. In fact, some of them are sometimes used to designate different species, leading to risks of confusion, controversy and even litigation.

It is very difficult to associate an exhaustive list of common names with a pilot name, as they can be very numerous. In addition to the *General Nomenclature of Tropical Timber*, which is a reference for wood names, a comprehensive inventory of common names for tropical and temperate woods can be found on the website of the *Forest Products Laboratory* in Madison (USA)⁷.

4. WOOD NAMES AND EUROPEAN LEGISLATION (EUDR)

[Article 9 Information requirements of Chapter 2 Obligations of operators and traders](#) states that *Operators shall collect, organise and keep for five years from the date of the placing on the market or of the export of the relevant products the following information, accompanied by evidence, relating to each relevant product: a description, including the **trade name** and type of the relevant products as well as, in the case of relevant products that contain or have been made using wood, the **common name** of the species and **their full scientific name**...*

The definition of *trade name* and *common name* is not specified.

In the case of pilot names, the information provided will be unambiguous.

In the case of vernacular names, the information provided will lack precision and will be open to dispute.

As mentioned in this article 9, the provision of the scientific name provides reference information of primary importance, if it can be provided. It is not always possible to accurately identify a botanical species *a posteriori* from the anatomical analysis of a wood sample. In some cases, this type of analysis can only identify the botanical genus. However, this does mean that it is almost always possible to identify the wood species, and therefore to give it a pilot name.

Bibliography

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7. https://www.fpl.fs.usda.gov/search/commonname_request.php