

Department of Information
and Agricultural Journalism
Agricultural Extension Service
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108
Tel. (612) 373-0710
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KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTING
IN LANDSCAPE TIMBERS

Landscape timbers can add an attractive element to your lawn or patio area, but if you use wood that isn't properly preserved, that beauty could be short lived.

Lewis Hendricks, extension forest products specialist at the University of Minnesota, says consumers should look for pressure treated landscape timbers and posts. Wood that is merely brushed with a preservative will not last much longer than untreated wood. Buy only wood that is stamped A.W.P.B.-- American Wood Preservers' Bureau, he advises.

Even with preservative treatment, some types of wood are ill-suited to outdoor uses where they contact the soil. Aspen, for example, will last only a few years even if treated. Some wood sold as "treated" is only soaked in a dark oil with a creosote odor or a green stain. This wood is not preserved at all, Hendricks cautions.

The heartwood of some species such as western red cedar is naturally durable, and can be used untreated. Be cautious, however, to specify the heartwood of western red cedar because the sapwood of this wood can also deteriorate.

Hendricks warns consumers not to accept vague answers or statements when buying landscape timbers. "Ask for information about treatment, preservative type and wood species in writing," he says. "A well treated timber should last more than 30 years."

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