

■ Sitka Spruce facts

Sitka spruce (*Picea Sitchensis*) is a coniferous tree which grows in the northwest of the US and Canada along the Pacific coast and is the state tree of Alaska. It has some special characteristics that deserve mention.

■ Sitka is highly prized for its tonal qualities. It is used by luthiers (makers of stringed instruments) for “tone wood,” the wood that one sees on the fronts and backs of guitars, violins, cellos and other fine stringed musical instruments. Additionally, the soundboards of Steinway pianos are made exclusively of Sitka spruce.

■ Sitka has the highest strength-to-weight ratio of any wood in the world. Its light weight with its stiffness allows it to vibrate very readily, hence its propensity to produce sound.

■ It is the tallest (315 ft) and largest spruce species in the world can grow to an age of over 800 years.

■ The Sitka I use was sold as high-end guitar wood but I make it into an instrument that plays turkey music.

■ The Sitka spruce is considered by some native cultures to have magical properties. It was also used by native peoples for food, medicine and clothing.

■ Of the 150 or so boat paddle calls Neil Cost made in his lifetime, only five of them were made of Sitka spruce. However, he considered one of those Sitka calls to be the finest sounding call he ever made.

■ When Sitka Spruce is quartersawn, i.e. sawed perpendicular to the annual rings, then faint medullary rays can be seen. In the example of the longbox below they can be seen as faint vertical banding.

