



Is Cedar or Pine or Cypress Right for Your Next Hive?

As we get closer to setting up our hives we need to look at the wood for the hives. Choosing the type of wood for our bee hive is an important decision. There are many wood choices available, Pine, cedar, poplar and cypress are common woods used for bee hives but pine and cedar are the most popular.

All woods have positives and negatives, especially when used for beekeeping. In Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, cypress and pine are both popular woods.

Doing some research we have found beekeepers have used pine with great success over the years at a lower cost than cedar & cypress.

Cedar Benefits



Because painting cedar isn't necessary as it is with pine, you can get up and running quicker with a cedar box. Typically, pine is painted to protect it from weather conditions, but a cedar box is durable enough that it will not deteriorate as quickly in the elements. It is recommended treating your cedar hive with a natural, plant-based oil, such as tung. Make sure you give your treated hive time to dry and air out.

Cedar is also lighter than pine. This weight difference isn't large, but when you're dealing with lots of boxes, any weight reduction is welcome. You can get cedar hives in eight frames as well, which cuts down on the weight considerably.

Finally (and most importantly), cedar is much longer lasting than pine. A study by the University of Maine found that surveyors' cedar corner posts and rail fences were still serviceable after 50 to 60 years of use whereas pine only lasted 4 to 7 years.

Cedar Negatives

Cedar is traditionally more expensive than pine. However, most beekeepers will see this up-front cost fade due to the durability and longevity of cedar over the years

Splitting can be an issue with cedar. When making hives, it's best to use kiln dried cedar to ensure the wood is dried properly and minimize any splitting.

Pine Benefits

Beekeepers have been building boxes out of pine since the first Langstroth hives, and the bees don't complain.

One benefit of pine is that it is more affordable than cedar, and more readily available.

Depending on the size of your box and the thickness of the wood, the weight can be about the same, but generally, pine is a little heavier than cedar.

Pine Negatives

If you elect to go with a pine box, most beekeepers will put a coat of a primer and a coat of exterior latex paint to protect the wood. This takes time to apply and time to dry before you place your bees inside. Also, the cost of the primer and paint add to the initial cost, although this is minor if you're planning on painting a lot of hives

Untreated pine doesn't hold up well to the elements. This means if you don't paint your pine, you're looking at replacements much sooner than if you went with cedar.

Cypress wood compared to pine wood for bee hives

Standard beekeeping equipment in the US is made from 3/4-inch thick pine wood. The pine used for bee hives and 2x4's is naturally a porous wood. When alive, trees use channels in the trunk to move water and sap up and down. When cut for lumber, these channels dry out and hold air instead of water/sap. This makes the wood light and easy to work with, but the channels are porous and hold water, making them rot quicker. Alternatively, cypress naturally has tighter growth rings and less channels between growth rings.

When buying bee boxes, if reducing upfront expenses is important, pine is an ideal wood for bee hives. Pine requires several coats of paint and maintenance to prevent rot, but can serve you and your bees well for many years. Cypress on the other hand, can cost more upfront but will hold up well under use and last a century, easily. Proving a better investment in the long term and a more beautiful wood to use. It can actually be left unpainted because of cypress natural resistance to decay.

Cypress wood isn't the same as when first harvested (in early 1900's). The "old growth" cypress from large trees is hard to find in the wild. If harvested, the wood is so valuable it wouldn't be turned into bee boxes. Modern cypress is called "new growth or second growth" cypress, but "old growth" and "new growth" come from the same tree, Bald Cypress. The "new growth" cypress doesn't have the same dense core

as the giant trees from the 1900's, but because cypress grows in or near water, it is a very dense piece of wood. The water actually stalls the growth of the trees, creating tight growth rings and reducing the air pockets that develop during drying.

The resistance to rot and pest infestation that cypress claims, mostly belongs to the "old growth" trees from the 1900's. Today's cypress wood does contain the same rot and weather resistant properties from the natural preservative cypressene, just not in the same density as the old trees. The USDA still classifies "new growth" cypress to be moderately decay resistant; as well as moderately heavy, moderately strong and moderately hard. Sounds like a good, affordable, long lasting wood for bee hives. Compared side by side with pine, cypress is always much denser and stronger than pine.

So which is better?

At the end of the day, the good news is your bees don't mind either way. Weigh the benefits, your personal preferences, and start keeping bees. The decision is all yours!