

01 Why Grow Veneer Black Walnut Trees?

John F. Kelsey - - - 2025 Jan - - - Rev 12

Why Grow Trees?



Sometimes the answer is easy, and sometimes it is difficult. An abandon three sided field, where a modern combine couldn't turn around, will eventually become a thicket and then a woodlot.

Figure 1. A good candidate field to convert to a valuable planting – too small for big agricultural equipment.

Figure 2. An abandoned field growing up with "other hardwoods"

The wisdom of converting abandoned acres is obvious, but the same decision regarding valuable agricultural land is not so easy, in fact, way beyond my brain. If the economics might look good vs. corn and soybeans, you still must



remember that trees usually outlive us. The payday will likely come to someone else – maybe yet to be born. You will need to have no concern about income from this property during your lifetime. You will be able to watch the value grow, but you will not be able to liquidate the investment. Maybe watching is reward enough. Maybe your family is strong and you want to pass on a beautiful legacy.

Why Grow Black Walnut Trees?

Black walnut, *Juglans nigra*, is the premier timber species of the central hardwood region of North America. Most woodlots and forest are an accidental mix of species, often including invasives and commercially worthless species. If trees are to be intentionally grown as an agricultural crop, it is rational to grow the most valuable species compatible with the available site. For our region, the most valuable species by far is black walnut.

Figure 3. West Virginia Stumpage Price Report, March 2018 for standing timber. Notice that standing walnut is more than twice any other species, and 20 times more than the “Other Hardwoods” category.

SPECIES	REGION 1	
	\$/MBF	(# RPT)
Walnut	\$928.41	9
White Oak	\$407.12	11
Red Oak	\$296.83	11
Other Oak	\$310.23	8
Cherry	\$375.49	9
Hard Maple	\$258.81	11
Soft Maple	\$228.84	10
Ash	\$188.34	8
Yellow Poplar	\$133.31	11
Basswood	\$75.97	4
Hickory	\$151.21	7
White Pine	\$67.86	2
Other Pine	\$70.00	1
Other Hardwood	\$44.56	2

Abandoned properties are soon taken over by invasives and explorer tree species. Most explorer species, elm, sycamore, box elder, etc. are included in the “Other Hardwoods” catch-all above. The above price report demonstrates the wisdom of planting black walnut vs. just letting things happen.

Why Grow Veneer Black Walnut Trees?

Now that you are convinced of growing black walnut, let's explore the advantage of going a step further and growing veneer quality black walnut.

Indiana Price Reports March 2016

Black Walnut	
Prime	1500-2000
No. 1	1000-1400
No. 2	500-1000
No. 3	350-700

Figure 4. Sawlog Prices Delivered.

The difference in prices for the various grades of sawlogs is mainly due to their differences in diameter, with "Prime" being the biggest. Note: The earlier West Virginia price report is for standing timber while these Indiana prices are "at the mill". Stumpage prices are usually around half of delivered prices.

Species/Grade	16-Mar Range (\$/MBF)
Black Walnut	
Prime	
12-13	2500-4750
14-15	4000-5500
16-17	5000-6750
18-20	7000-8500
21-23	8000-10500
24-28	9500
>28	10000

Figure 5. Veneer Log Prices Delivered for various diameters

Black walnut veneer logs typically sell for 5 times the value of the same size black walnut sawlog. In an economic analysis, this factor-of-5 multiplier can change a losing enterprise into a winner. With almost no effort at all, you can grow low quality black walnut trees. With the right plan, it is as easy to grow veneer logs as saw logs, maybe easier. Let's not waste our resources, effort, and precious time growing saw logs, "other hardwood", or firewood.



Figure 6. A black walnut planting by Bill Hammitt in southwest Ohio

Why not make it a valuable woodlot, a beautiful black walnut woodlot - a place to rest – a family treasure - the pride of your holdings?

“Wise is the man whose grandfather planted black walnuts”.