

Commercial Willow Types

Brown Willow is natural green willow that has been dried with its bark on. Once dried the willow looks olive green to greyish-brown in colour and is suitable for basketry, outdoor sculpture work and hurdles as it has an outer skin for protection. As a rule of thumb, to make it pliable for weaving, soak brown willow in cold water for at least a day per foot, e.g. a 5ft bundle will need 5 days soaking time and then mellow it. i.e. wrap it in a damp cloth and keep in a cool place for about a day before using. Brown rods will keep flexible for a week or so before going out of condition.

Steamed Willow is natural green willow that has been steamed in a boiler for several hours. This process releases the tannins in the willow which help to preserve it and stains the willow bark a chocolate to black colour. The bark remains on, protecting the willow from the elements, so making it ideal for outdoor sculptures and structures. Steamed willow requires about 1/2 a day soaking per foot, so 5ft lengths will need about 2 ½ days soaking time. Again mellow the willow for a day or so prior to using and the rods will keep for a few days or so before going out of condition.

When soaked Brown & Steamed Willow are nearly flexible enough to use they can also be 'finished' by steaming for about an hour. Wrap the willow tightly in a plastic tarp and using a diy wallpaper steamer, (having removed the wallpaper head attachment), steam for about an hour and then mellow. This makes the willow really flexible and enables you also to change the willow's colour. This 'finishing' steaming method can also be used if your prepared soaked willow is beginning to lose its flexibility.

Buff Willow is natural green willow that has been processed by boiling in water for 8 – 10 hours. The bark is then stripped off in a machine to reveal a warm buff (orange brown) colour. Buff willow is suitable for indoor use such as baskets and furniture. Being stripped of its bark, the willow will perish more quickly if exposed to the elements. Only a short soaking time of up to 3 hours is needed in cold water to make this willow pliable for weaving. Mellow for as long as the soaking time before weaving.

White Willow is willow that is cut during the winter and then left to stand in shallow water until the sap rises. During this time it will continue to grow. Around mid – spring the willow is stripped of its bark whilst in full leaf. This exposes a stark white rod underneath. The willow is stripped, dried and brought in the same day to prevent discolouring. White willow is mainly used for baskets and is not suitable for outdoor use. White willow takes slightly longer than buff to soak and like buff benefits from being mellowed in a damp cloth for as long as the soaking time. Both buff and white rods can remain wrapped for 1-2 days but if not used, must be then fully dried off.

Green Willow in willow grower's terms means freshly/newly cut willow that is extremely flexible immediately without the need for soaking. It is suitable for plant climbers, hurdle making, outdoor sculpture projects and as non living willow for weaving in living willow structures. The willow rods will shrink slightly as they dry out and this willow will not have the longevity of brown or steamed willow. If you wish to use green willow, cut the willow rods when the plant is dormant, leave rods under a hedge for about 3 weeks and then use up to a 1/3 of green willow in your basket or sculpture. Left under a shady hedge, green willow can remain flexible and ready to weave for a few months.

Living Willow is willow that is freshly cut from Late Autumn through to Early Spring. It is kept alive in water so that it will grow when planted. Popular varieties include *Salix viminalis* (also known as Cane Osier) and more recently a number of Hybrid varieties of various growth rates and colours have been created specifically for outdoor living structures such as arbours, tunnels, screens and domes.

A soaking bag or bath is usually suitable for soaking buff and white willow in, but due to bark, tannins and dirt it's best to soak all other willow types in a soaking bag or outside in a trough, pond, stream or paddling pool!

Please note that soaking and mellowing times will vary according to the type of willow, the size, the water temperature and time of year. The above is really a rough guide!

Preserving Your Willow Sculpture

After Your Willow Sculpture Day! The following instructions are aimed to let you know how to finish off your willow sculpture at home and maximise the longevity of your creation.

Small Bundle of Willow If you have taken a small bundle of willow with you and wish to use it within the next day or two, then once home immediately wrap the willow in a damp towel or cloth, leave outside out of direct sunlight and preferably in a damp place, (under a shady hedge is ideal). This willow can then, if required, be used to finish off your sculpture. If you would like to add more willow to your sculpture but are unable to do so in the couple of days following your sculpture day, then undo the bundle of willow, spread the willow rods out in a single layer on a floor in a dry place, (a shed or garage is ideal), and let the willow fully dry out. When you would like to use this willow follow the instructions for your particular willow type as per the instructions under **Commercial Willow Types**.

Your Finished Willow Sculpture Leave your finished sculpture to fully dry out before treating it with any kind of preservative. Place your sculpture in a dry place and depending on the time of year your sculpture will be fully dried out within a week or so. As a general guide in summer this will take 2 – 3 days and in winter a couple of weeks.

Preserving Your Willow Sculpture There are a few different ways in which you can preserve your sculpture, lengthening its lifespan and often giving the willow a lovely sheen. Remember to wear clothing that you don't mind getting stained by the preservative and any equipment used, i.e. plastic funnel and bottles will most likely not be able to be used afterwards for any other purpose. Spray your sculpture with preservative on a surface that you don't mind getting stained, I mostly spray my sculptures on grass, (which sometimes goes a bit brown but grows back), if possible in a sheltered place, (you don't really want to be moving the sculpture around when it's wet) and most importantly try not to spray on a windy day!

Linseed Oil/Turps Substitute (50/50 method) This is the traditional method of preserving sculptures that willow sculptors often use. Using an empty plant spray bottle, (or similar), pour in half Linseed Oil to half Turps Substitute. Both Linseed Oil and Turps Substitute can be found in DIY stores. Shake to mix the liquids and then spray liberally over your sculpture. Leave to dry, at least overnight, and then spray a second coat if required. The amount of this preservative in a plant spray bottle should be enough for at least a couple of treatments. Although real turpentine is expensive I've heard that sculptures, (and baskets), treated with Linseed Oil/Turpentine 50/50 method have far more longevity.

Devon Wood Oil This is a natural preservative often used by willow sculptors. It contains more expensive raw materials including pure Turpentine and Tung Oil and has an ultra-violet filter added. Made by Wilsons Paints in Exmouth, Devon, it can be purchased from the Coates English Willow shop, their shop or online. www.wilsonspaints.co.uk/devon-wood-oil To treat your willow sculpture pour the Devon Wood Oil into a plant spray bottle and use as per the Linseed Oil/Turps 50/50 method.

Outdoor Furniture Oil e.g. Osmo / Danish Oil/ Willow sculptors also use these oils to treat their sculptures. Please take note that if the oil turns your outdoor furniture black in colour, (as some seem to do), the oil will also blacken your willow sculpture.

Yacht Varnish As before, thoroughly dry out your sculpture before using this type of treatment and apply as per the manufacturer's instructions. Due to its viscosity, you may wish to paint this on your sculpture!

Longevity of Your Sculpture Your willow sculpture is made of a totally natural material that will degrade over time. By treating it with preservative every six months or so and by placing your sculpture in a sheltered position you will be able to increase its lifespan. Most importantly, enjoy your willow sculpture, it's a unique creation made by your very own hands!

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