

The Dulcimer, A Blue Ridge Tradition

A dulcimer is a fretted stringed instrument with three or four strings that is played on your lap. There are many different shapes, styles and types of wood used to make a dulcimer.

Black Walnut ☐

Because of its strength, ease of working with, and its availability in the mountains, black walnut is a common choice.



Black walnut trees have **compound leaves** (many leaflets on one stem). Each leaf has 12 to 15 **leaflets** (blades).



The fruit is green and is about the size of a lemon in spring. In the fall, the fruit darkens to brown and falls from the tree. The hard nut shell is dark brown with a tasty nut inside.



Dulcimer

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Music from the Mountains



Look, Wayne Henderson is shaping the side of a guitar! We visited Wayne in his workshop. He showed us which trees were used to make different parts of traditional musical instruments from the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Take this brochure on your walk today to find the trees used to make music from the mountains.



Songs from the Wood

Check the box next to each tree you find on your hike.

the Face (front)

The face of the instrument vibrates and transmits sound like a speaker. For the best sound, a soft wood needs to be used. In the Blue Ridge Mountains, red spruce is the best choice. If red spruce cannot be found, white pine can be used instead.

Red Spruce ☐

Red spruce is an evergreen that grows at higher elevations. Red spruce trees have short needles with sharp points that branch out from all sides of the twig. Look for round cones that are a little larger than an egg.



White Pine ☐

White pine is an evergreen tree with long needles in **bundles** (fascicles) of five. The cones are long and thin. The tree trunk is straight.



the Sides and Back

When a string is plucked, sound waves travel down inside the instrument. For the best sound, a hard wood is needed to reflect the sound back out through the face of the instrument.



Sugar Maple ☐

Sugar maple has been the favorite hard wood for the back and sides of stringed instruments in the Blue Ridge Mountains for years.

The sugar maple leaf looks like a hand with five fingers. They have winged seeds, called **sumaras**, that spin as they fall from the tree.

Mandolin

the Fingerboard

The fingerboard is a thin piece of hard wood that is glued to the front of the neck. Because the metal strings would dig into a softer wood over time, an extremely hardwood, like dogwood, needs to be used.

Dogwood ☐

Dogwood bark looks like a worn checkerboard with crooked squares. In spring, dogwoods have yellow flowers with four white modified leaves, called **bracts**.



the Neck

The strings on an instrument need to be strung very tightly. Because of this, a sturdy wood is used for the neck. Wild cherry has been used because of its strength and rich color.

Wild Cherry ☐

A young cherry tree has smooth dark bark, with horizontal stripes called **lenticels**. A lot of trees have thick cracked bark when older.



Mountain Banjo

