

## Pruning Black Walnut for Veneer

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Our Walnut Council members want to know why we promote pruning black walnut trees so much in our meetings and field days. They feel that topic seems to occupy a lot of our discussion time. And, for good reason!

I just checked two recent sales I have marked and looked at the reason why the butt logs did not qualify for veneer.

✓ Sale 1 had 137 trees marked and 18 trees had A grade veneer butt logs. B grade logs numbered 15 and the reason why they were 3 faces clear was because of a limb knot. Limb knots on 67 trees were the main issue for a lumber grade designation. Other problems were: small diameters (27) bird peck (3), dead/down (4), lightning (2) and other defects (1).

✓ Sale 2 had 97 trees of which 27 had A grade veneer butt logs. Higher than usual. Limb knots/scars lowered the value on 48 trees while small diameters (19), lightning (1) and wire (2) were the other culprits

I had marked small diameter walnut trees if the trees had bad form or poor growth rates and either their future appeared short or it was obvious those trees would never produce quality logs.

The bottom line is that limbs and knots were, and are, the main reason why most trees do not produce high grade veneer. In the first sale almost half (48.9%) of the butt logs were lumber logs because of the knots. In the second sale 48 trees out of 97 trees (49.5%) had lower values because of limb knots.

In Sale 2 the A grade veneer logs brought an average of \$4.14 per board foot while the B grade logs brought an average of \$2.50 per board foot, C grade veneer \$1.50 and lumber grade \$.75 per board foot. These are all butt logs or the bottom log. In Sale 2 if all the C grade lumber butt logs had been managed properly during their growing years the potential sale value could have jumped almost \$10,000. The trees which were dead or small diameter were not included in the value increase. Now I admit this comparison is highly impractical, but it points out potential lost income.

These sales bear out my preaching to *prune early and prune often*. We cannot eliminate lightning, bird peck, wind throw and some other natural action, but we can prune! Pruning of black walnut and the oaks should occur during their dormant period to avoid fungal infections. This recent cold snap has triggered the ideal time to prune your trees.

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