

Future of Wood: What To Await in 2028

What kinds of wood can we expect to sell in 20 years? Here's a forecast:

By: Craig Webb, ProSales Magazine

New Products

Innovations like cross-laminated timbers and polymer-infused plywood will enable wood to be used in mini-skyscrapers and danger zones. Nanotechnology will transform even mundane products, such as creating stains that change the color of siding based on the season.

More Engineered Wood

Shifts in market demand and available resources will spur sales of products made from wood chips, laminates, and shavings—mixed with glues and other additives—rather than solid-sawn lumber. Studs will remain largely solid sawn.

Energy Influencers

High oil prices will accelerate the trend toward resins and glues made from nonpetroleum products. Hefty transport costs will affect long-distance lumber shipments. Mills will become mini-utilities, generating power and creating wood products meant for producing heat and electricity. Some mills could conclude it makes more sense to convert wood into ethanol or wood-stove pellets than 2x4s.

Climbing the Value Ladder

Companies will work relentlessly to make higher-quality products out of stuff that previously had been thrown away at the mill or never even cut down in the forest.

Better Trees on Less Land

Urbanization will reduce private ownership, particularly in the Southeast. But scientists will improve the speed and quality of what's grown on those lots, so output won't decline.

Green and Government Forces

Public forests created as timber sources increasingly will be protected and valued for their role in fighting global warming. Some second-growth trees will get a second life as they get too big to harvest. Areas east of the Mississippi will see increased sales of recycled lumber taken from disassembled homes.

Fading, But Not Gone

Wood decking and siding will keep facing challenges from composites and nonwood products, like fiber cement. Plywood won't go away, but it will become a niche, specialty player.