

HOME & GARDEN

Sustainable, locally grown Albus wood good for fencing

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

In recent years, Mike McKamey of All That Wood in Hermiston was having trouble acquiring enough old-growth Western red cedar to provide enough fence board for his customers.

Two years ago, Lee Jamerson, a salesman from the Collins Companies, a forest product company based in Portland, asked McKamey if he was interested in a new type of lumber, known as Pacific Albus wood. Jamerson brought it, McKamey liked it and he kept some in his yard.

Pacific Albus is a hybrid poplar hardwood almost perfect for building. It is also a local product — bred, grown and harvested at the Boardman Tree Farm.

McKamey sat on the new Albus wood for about a year to see how it would weather. Like all wood that is untreated with stain or paint, it grays with moisture, a side-effect of rot. But, the wood keeps its integrity as it grays and remains strong and sturdy.

After the year was up and he was satisfied with how it handled the year's worth of sun, wind and moisture, McKamey began to sell the "next generation's fenceboard," a name he came up with to create interest. Since last April, he said for every 10 customers who come and buy fenceboard, seven buy the Albus and that number may grow to eight soon. He said some still prefer the more established Western red cedar, but the Pacific Albus is beginning to catch on.



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

These 14 boards show the difference between treated and untreated albus. The three gray boards on the right are two years old and have been outside that long, while the three on the right have been treated and have been outside for two years. The boards on the left, out for a year, have all been treated with stain.

"Last year I just came up with the name 'next generation's fenceboard' for the simple fact that it's a sus-

tainable product that we're able to grow and harvest (locally).

"The fact that being able

to bring something to the public that's a sustainable product that's really exciting."

A main difference between the Western red cedar and the Pacific Albus is how it takes paint. Cedar must be primed before applying any coats of paint, otherwise it will begin to peel when exposed to any levels of moisture.

That isn't an issue with Pacific Albus. Paint can be applied directly to the wood and it'll hold, and stain goes on easily, as well. It's another reason McKamey dubbed it "the next generation of fenceboard," and another reason it's been so popular. Plus, with the way Albus grays, it becomes an attractive option to those who don't want to stain it, who just want to put it up and have it turn its unusual

shade of blue-gray. However, McKamey suggested that if sprinklers are close to the fence, it should be treated anyway.

"Even though it's going to go gray, the sprinklers are going to the fence," McKamey said. "My favorite thing to people is — I always explain to them: think about where you put your fence up and where you put your sprinklers. You can water your fence as much as you want, but it's not going to grow. You're just going to ruin it."

Albus is also a stronger grain than cedar. When cut into narrow slats, cedar has a tendency to split when screws or nails are inserted. To demonstrate Pacific Albus' grain strength, McKamey cut it into slats and

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