















YES

Ash, white	White ash is one of my favorites—my personal walking stick is carved from white ash. It's sturdy, has a good heft to it, and finishes with an interesting and pronounced grain. It is somewhat stringy and does not lend itself well to the drawknife or spokeshave.	
Ash, green	Green ash is similar to the white variety in its finish qualities and its stringiness. It has many straight side branches at a near 45° angle, which makes it good for bird beak tops.	 <small>Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA/NRCS, 1989</small>
Ash, mountain	Mountain ash allowed to cure while exposed to the weather develops interesting and unusual surface spalling. I have carved several that have had a polka dot spalt effect. Mountain ash also exhibits an interesting contrast of light sapwood and dark heartwood, sometimes evident in even the slender branches. Old mountain ash that has been hand rubbed will produce grain lines that are among the most beautiful I have ever seen. The wood is easy to carve, being fairly soft with a very regular, close grain.	
Beech, American	American beech is another favorite, especially if it's aged for some time and has developed spalt lines. Its growth patterns often result in a delightful crookedness, with many burls that can serve as bulk for features or to simply add to the beauty of the shaft. It cuts smoothly in almost any direction and produces attractive grain lines when finished.	 <small>Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA/NRCS, 1995</small>
Birch	Birch works well for walking sticks. I've not carved much gray birch, but I have carved black or cherry birch. It's a smooth-cutting wood with a close, regular grain. The natural color is a light cream color that I find uninteresting, so I try to work with pieces with interesting burls or areas on the shaft where the bark can be left on to add character.	 <small>Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA/NRCS, 1995</small>
Black walnut	Black walnut is an almost universal favorite. Although hard, it cuts nicely and sands easily. Walnut's most attractive features are the variety and contrast of colors that develop between the sapwood and heartwood upon finishing. Unfortunately, this contrast is not generally evident in small branches. A whittled or sanded shaft, if stained with a walnut stain, shows exceptional grain qualities. The texture of the bark also makes black walnut a favorite for sticks with bark shafts.	
Butternut	Butternut, also called oil nut or white walnut, is another universal favorite. The heartwood develops the same set of contrasting colors as those of black walnut, but this is not observed in most small branches. Butternut is a soft wood that is easy to carve. Because of the ease with which it can be detailed, it is also a favorite of many carvers.	
Dogwood	Dogwood has excellent carving qualities. It is dense with a regular, close grain. The sapwood has a reddish tinge and the heartwood is dark brown. Often this contrast can be observed even in small branches. It carves nicely and develops interesting grain colors on finish.	

YES

CAUTION

NO

Maple	The various maples are among the most readily available stock to the carver. I have carved more maple than almost any other wood. It carves smoothly and results in a sturdy, hard finish. Depending on the age of the wood and its method of curing, the resulting piece can have anything from a soap-like smoothness to the gnarled and burled appearance of an antique.	
Oak	Everyone likes oak. Most oaks, if cured out in the weather, will develop the most beautiful grain lines and spalt marks.	
Yellow poplar	I deliberately seek yellow poplar, or tulip poplar, for my snakes. I've probably carved more yellow poplar than any other wood. It is actually of the magnolia family and unrelated to other poplars. It is soft, easy to carve, and takes detail well. The wood is quite porous and gives dramatic effects with penetrating oil stains. Because of the porosity, several coats of varnish will soak into the wood and provide a surface finish that is quite hard and resistant to marking.	
Sycamore	Sycamore develops with growth patterns that provide some charming twists. Like beech, it often contains many burls. If the grain is cooperative, it's quite easy to carve. Unfortunately, the many burls that add to its character also cause the grain to undergo many changes of direction, which makes carving it a challenge.	
Aspen, quaking	Don't waste your time carving quaking aspen. It dries out and feels more like a reed than a walking stick.	
Basswood, American	American basswood, or linden, is soft and light. It is the wood of preference for many carvers because it cuts smoothly in almost any direction and accepts fine details and feather etching readily. I have carved a few snakes in it. The carving was easy but the finished product marks too readily—you can make depressions in the wood with a fingernail, so as a walking stick it's more suitable as a wall hanging.	
Ginkgo	I've carved ginkgo. Don't waste your time.	