Your Complete Guide to the World of Magic Wands

The wand is arguably the most iconic tool of the witch, and its powers are both legendary and practical, both symbolic and vital. The wand is the pen with which a witch writes her magic. And yet many witches, both young and old, don’t know how or where to find the specific wands they need (or allow the wands to find them!) for the magical jobs at hand. As high priestess and author Gypsey Teague says, “You can’t successfully perform a vast array of spells with a single wand any more than you can cook and serve an entire feast with a single butter knife. You must have more than one.” This book shows you how to create a whole toolkit of wands for use in your magical work.

You will learn
• how to construct a wand and understand its fundamental anatomy
• the names, spirits, and attributes of the many woods (and other materials) from which wands can be made
• how to craft and nurture a powerful partnership with your wands
• how to choose which wand to use for different magical purposes

Rooted in Teague’s extensive knowledge of plant science and ethnobotany, as well as her years of magical practice, the book examines the uses and benefits of each wand component (primarily woods, shrubs, grasses, vines, and some metals). It details each material’s associations to various gods and goddesses, relationships to specific types of magic, and the results a practitioner can expect to achieve from each.

You will find tips and resources for finding materials and handcrafting, as well as correspondence charts for easy reference.

“Finally, the work of the wand is receiving the attention it deserves as a tool in the magic of the witch!”
– Orion Foxwood, author of The Flame in the Cauldron
The wand chooses the witch; the witch does not choose the wand.

Two women, one about sixty and a younger one in her teens, enter a tent at a pagan event. The small sign on a table by the entrance says CANES AND WANDS FOR ALL OCCASIONS. They are a few steps behind a man in his late twenties. The man is wearing jeans, boots, and a T-shirt that says across the front DO AS YE SHALL, RECEIVE AS YE WILL — THRICE. The young man walks up to the back table where a woman sits reading. She looks up and brushes a loose strand of blonde hair out of her face and says, “Good morning. Cane or wand?”

“I’m being threatened,” he says as he looks around the tent. “I need protection.”

“Protection,” the blonde responds, and the other two watch from the edge of the tent. “Let me see what we have then.”

She pulls a few long, slender silk bags from under a glass display case and spreads them out on the table.

“One of these should do the trick,” she smiles.

The man passes his hand over the bags. He touches none of them but stops at one toward his right, second from the end.

“This one,” he declares.

“A good choice,” the blonde smiles again. She carefully wraps the bag in white paper and places it in a small box, never looking inside. “Fig,” she says as she hands the wrapped wand to her customer. “Fourteen inches long, double
knot and single ring. A very good choice.” She bows slightly and he returns the bow.

The customer doesn’t ask how she knew what was in the bag and she doesn’t explain that even though the silk bags appear identical, each has a small difference that can be seen if looked for. He would use the wand to protect himself against whatever was challenging him. It would be a good fit.

After the man leaves, the two women approach the counter. The blonde looks up and smiles again.

“Cane or wand?” she asks.

“First wand,” the older woman with gray-streaked hair says quietly.

“For this young lady?” the blonde inquires.

“Yes,” the older woman replies. “Initiation tonight.”

The little girl never looks up. She stares at the ground unsure of what to do. She has been studying for over a year and is to be initiated tonight and admitted to the coven. Afraid to do anything incorrect this weekend, the girl has kept to herself and tried to stay out of trouble. She had succeeded so far, she thought, though the day was still young.

“First wand,” the blonde woman mused. “We must offer a good selection then.” She began placing long velvet wand bags across her table, covering almost five feet of the counter.

When she was finished, the woman behind the counter addressed the young woman with her head bowed.

“The wand chooses the witch,” the blonde said. “The witch does not choose the wand.”

“Ma’am?” the girl looked up suddenly, thinking the woman was reciting something from Harry Potter.

“Place your hand over the bags,” the blonde instructed. “Pass your hand slowly over each until the wand that is yours tells you.”

The young girl looked at her High Priestess inquiringly.

“You can do it,” the older woman assured her. “Pass your hand over the bags one by one. You’ll know when it’s right.”

The teenager began at her left and passed her right hand over each bag, holding it there for a few seconds and then continuing. At the end of the long row the girl began pushing the bags slightly toward the blonde across from her.

“I’m getting nothing from these,” she said softly.
When the field was down to six bags, the girl began again. Slowly, and this time more deliberately, she passed her right hand over each bag. Finally she stopped and pointed.

“This one,” she said.

“We’ll take this one,” the older woman replied. She paid for the wand and they left the shop.

Purpleheart, thought the woman as she put the others away. Single flute at handle. Triple band at head.

The wand would give the young girl courage and self-sacrifice. She would carry that wand for forty years through a number of covens until as High Priestess of her own coven she would choose a bloodwood wand the night before her Croning.

Turning back toward the front of the tent, the blonde greeted a man and his wife.

“Cane or wand?” she asked.

Purpose

This book began as two seemingly unrelated meetings in two states at two separate times of the year. I am a woodworker. When I was younger, I built houses with my uncle and then had a company that built residential and light commercial buildings. I have also logged in New Hampshire during a very cold stretch of winter and poured steel in a foundry during a very hot summer. These jobs trained me to create.

Three years ago at Florida Pagan Gathering I was discussing wands that I turned on a lathe in my small woodshop with some Elders and practicing witches. I had about two dozen wands of various woods for sale, and customers would come into my tent and hold them, finding one that spoke to them and had the requisite energy for their use. One customer in particular said he liked black walnut, but lately it had been giving him trouble when casting healing spells. He eventually found a very nice white willow wand that he felt would do the job and left smiling. I didn’t think
anything more of that incident until later in the year when I was talking to some students in the landscape architecture graduate program in the building where I work.

I’m the Branch Head of the Gunnin Architecture Library at Clemson University and also a faculty member in the landscape architecture program. I was sitting with some students toward the end of the semester, discussing their work and what they’d called out—a professional term referring to the plants, trees, and shrubs chosen for a specific design.

The owner of the property in the design liked nut trees and had a number on the property. One was a medium-sized black walnut. He said that he wanted the house to have a garden, and the walnut tree would give the plants enough shade to keep them from burning. He specifically mentioned having tomatoes and some other vegetables. It was then that I offered a critical problem with the black walnut: the chemical juglone, released through a process known as allelopathy, the discharge of one species of plant inhibiting or restricting the growth of another, kills or damages many plants around the tree—especially tomatoes and peppers. I also commented that the bark or pollen of the black walnut can cause skin problems for those who are susceptible to such issues.

That’s when I remembered the first conversation in my tent in Ocala, Florida, a few months earlier. The witch in question had tried to use a poisonous wand to heal. I also then understood why the white willow wand was the one that had spoken to him. For the next month I thought on this, and I realized after looking into a number of reference books that even though we go to great lengths to explain to our witchlings how to find and prepare their own wand for use, we almost completely ignore the wood it’s made of. You would not use a holly wand for a new moon ritual any more than you would use an ebony one for a full moon. If you want strength, then you would use oak and reserve the willow for resilience and survival spells.

This book came about after these two meetings. Here, you will find organic and inorganic wands. The first, and largest, part of the book covers organic materials—woods. Most are trees, but some shrubs, roots, grasses, and vines are also included since they may be large enough to work as wands. Also in this section will be a discussion on hybrid wands, those cu-
rious mixings of two or more woods fashioned for a purpose so unique that a standard wand may not fit the bill. I look at the specifics of the wood: its grain, color, hardness, and how it turns on a lathe and polishes. I also discuss the properties of each tree or shrub and comment on specific rituals associated with that particular wand.

The second part covers inorganic materials—metal. With the growing interest in Steampunk Magic, more wands are being crafted from brass and bronze. I take into account the shape, hardness of the metal, and magical properties. I also recommend specific spells and rituals for each permutation.

The third part of the book will be a short discussion on the wands of the Harry Potter franchise of books and theme parks. With the growing interest in the young wizard and other wand makers claiming to place phoenix feathers, dragon heartstrings, or unicorn hairs in their wands, I think an explanation of whether or not Ms. Rowling got it right when she wrote about the powers of the wands and those who wield them is worthwhile.

While no book is exhaustive on this subject due to the number of woods and materials out there, I’ve included enough local materials and locally available exotic materials to give the reader a knowledgeable choice in the matter of wands and their uses. Only the end result by the user will show whether I’ve succeeded.

Wand Basics

One simply does not serve soup with a butter knife!

Wands. Without them we would be missing a great part of our tool kit. Scott Cunningham says in his book *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* that you can even use a wooden dowel purchased from a hardware store as a wand. While that is true, and any piece of wood works under general conditions, it really is important to know the source of your material and the conditions under which that piece was obtained.

Another staple reference book of witchcraft is Raymond Buckland’s *Complete Book of Witchcraft*. Here, Buckland says that the power of the wand comes from the witch and not necessarily from the wand. I agree
with that to a point. While you may practice magic naked with your index finger, it is important that you understand the power of the tools if you are going to use them. Therefore, I believe you should choose your wand more carefully than either Buckland or Cunningham suggest.

There is a partnership between the witch and the wand. Any witch who has his or her favorite or working wand will tell you the energy generated between the wand and the witch is significant and prevalent. Wands are like shoes or jeans or shirts or your favorite little black dress. When it’s right, it’s just right and you know it. Therefore, when you craft your first or third or ninth wand and it doesn’t respond to you, don’t worry. A piece of wood in the wild or in the lumberyard is very different once you begin talking to it and crafting it. Think of building your relationship with your wand as dating. You may go out on a number of dates with a number of different people before you get the right spark. And even then, after marriage the spark may still not be right. So it is with your wand. Work for the spark, but don’t expect overnight success.

For a more detailed approach to wands, I recommend Dorothy Morrison’s book The Craft: A Witch’s Book of Shadows. Morrison goes into detail about the particular properties of wands and explains that it’s just not about wandering aimlessly, gathering sticks and twigs in the hopes that one might become a wand. She explains the harvesting of the wand, which I think is an essential part of all witch’s training. She also goes into detail about personalizing your wand after you have procured the material. These are all important aspects of the training young witches should receive.

Most authors agree that a wand should be approximately the length from the tip of your middle finger to the crook of your arm. This makes it the length of your hand and forearm. To me, that is a little long, and I personally like a shorter wand of about fourteen inches. But this book is not about length as much as it’s about substance, so I’m not going to lay down some grand law to follow in making your wand.

It is important to understand that there are wands and then there are wands. With the popularity of Harry Potter, wands have gained an elevated status in pop culture. An entire generation has grown up with a renewed sense of wand appreciation not seen since Disney’s Cinderella of 1960. Now, not just witches and fairy godmothers wield wands—every young
child who has read Rowling’s books and envisioned him- or herself as a wizard at Hogwarts has a wand in hand. Unfortunately, these same children grow up not understanding the difference between a play stick called a wand and a wand as held by an actual magician. These children and adults believe that you can put a phoenix feather or a unicorn hair into a wand to gain more power against the Dark Lord. So is the way of popular culture, I suppose. However, for a detailed explanation of the wands of the Harry Potter books and how they correspond to the characters they chose, see the section later in this book.

There is a saying that one simply does not serve soup with a butter knife. This means we do not use the same tool for every occasion. In construction, people say that if all you have is a hammer, then everything begins to look like a nail. That is very true with wands. If we have one and only one wand, then I believe we can only do spells or rituals that accommodate that one particular wand. You can’t successfully perform a vast array of spells with a single wand any more than you can cook and serve an entire feast with a single butter knife. You must have more than one. This is a book of choices.

This book is also a book of construction. Each wand discussed will include how the wand was made. The lathe is just a tool; but then again, so is a wand. Some wands should be crafted at specific times and days of the month or even the year. If you cast a variety of spells and perform a plethora of rituals, then you should, and I say “should” since I don’t want to be accused of being dogmatic, have a wand for each area within which you are working. And not all wands should be from a single material. Wands are like anything else you use. If you must have two or three traits for a spell, then why not turn a wand out of two or three different woods?

Wands are also like batteries; there is a positive end and a negative end. I polled my witch community to ask how they use their wands. Over 90 percent said they use the pointy end only, which we will refer to as the head of the wand. A good friend added that if the wand is unidirectional—that is, one end is pointier than the other—then he will only cast with the head, but if he has a wand that has no head, then he considers it a bidirectional wand and either end will do. I agree with that wholeheartedly for him, but I contend that even if there is a head and a base, you still may use both ends.
A battery is powerful from both ends, and you must connect a wire to each end to draw the current from it. So is it with a wand. However, do not think of the metaphor of the battery as a discussion of good and evil. The positive and negative ends of the battery are just two sides of the same force, like two sides of the same coin. Neither is better or worse. They are used in conjunction to be a complete whole. Sort of like the yin and yang of the power you are holding.

If you are using a peach wand, the properties are both positive—love and fertility—as well as negative—exorcism. For love and fertility you would hold the base and direct your energy with the head. If you were working an exorcism or banishing spell, then you would need more of a negative power, the power of the base, and therefore you would turn the wand around and hold the head and use the base.

The section of the wand between the base and the head is the shaft. Some bases are ornamental or embellished. In a metal wand, the base may be large and fashioned around a crystal. In an organic wand, the base may be finely tooled or turned and marked with sigils or other symbols important to its user. Therefore, the base may extend far into the shaft, but that is what the wand dictates.
Let’s now look at how we make the wands and the space we occupy while doing that.

Preparing Your Workspace

The other day a friend asked me if anyone could make a wand. My answer was both yes and no. While anyone can make a drumstick, which is really what a wand looks like to most people, not just anyone can make a wand for someone else. Also, an individual may wander through the woods and choose a piece of fallen branch that suits him or her, but that doesn’t mean that any branch may become a wand for anyone.

There are a few who craft wands. Some do it all by hand, some by hand and machine, and some by other methods. The results are usually the same: a beautiful tool meant for a specific individual, even if that individual has not yet been chosen by the wand. But what does it take to go from raw materials to a finished product capable of casting energy both out and in for years and decades to come? It takes a tool specifically fitted to the energy requirements of a single person. You may gravitate to the perfect wand the first time you find a wand maker; in some instances that choice may take years—or it may never happen. Those are the odds of wands.

One of my graduate students once asked if I took apprentices. I said yes. Then I added a caveat that the individual would have to be an Elder in a pagan tradition, path, or system and have twenty years of experience working with woods and tools. My student asked if five years of shop would get him in the door. That’s when I explained not and/or but and. I said I could take the five years, but he would still need to be an Elder, or at least a senior practitioner. I knew he was not pagan, and he knew it too. I told him that perhaps next year, when I expand my boxes and display business, I may be able to hire him since I know he’s quite diligent at what he does and knowledgeable of building wood properties. But he’s not a witch.

When I start in my shop, the first thing I do is throw up a circle. I am using the term “throw up” because I don’t perform a full-blown circle for shop work. I cast with my finger in a modified Georgian fashion. I ask the Gods and Goddesses of wood, creativity, and magic to watch over me and
keep me safe. I also promise that my wands will be made with the proper respect to the woods and those who will ultimately use them. I think that is important when dealing with a magical tool.

I think this is part of the reason not just anyone can make a wand. A wand is a sacred tool and should be created in a sacred way. Now the second part of creating the wand is what happens inside the circle.

I make certain that the wood used is purchased, donated, or cut with reverence. If I am the one harvesting the wood, I will talk to the tree, touch which pieces need to be cut, and then with permission trim the pieces. I usually have ten to twenty different woods drying at any time in my wood racks so that I'm always behind in turning wands. Since it takes at least a year to thoroughly dry cut wood, there is a lot of downtime between the harvesting and the finished product. Some wands I’ll turn when the wood is still green just to see what will happen. I use these as teaching wands when I give seminars and panels, since they will ultimately warp slightly, or in some cases significantly.

After gathering and drying the wood, the process is pretty much the same. I first cut a blank. This is a piece of wood that's 1/4 inch x 1/4 inch x 16 inches. Next, I drill a small hole at each end, slightly rounding one end to fit in my chuck and not split the blank, and then I turn the wand. If the piece starts out curved or irregularly shaped—this can happen with shrubs and vines such as rosemary, wisteria, or poison ivy—then I do everything by hand, starting with a very coarse sandpaper and working my way down to a very fine grit. The more I do of either, the more I learn. I now know that rosemary can be worked with a belt sander to a certain point since the outer bark is hard and rough. Rosemary also responds best if it is worked during a lightning storm. I don’t know why, it just does. Poison ivy must be worked with a rasp plane because of the dust, and if it is still dripping, as the last pieces were, then extra caution must be used. You can find a rasp plane at your local hardware store. It has what looks like a cheese grater on the bottom, and it’s used for quick planing when a flat, smooth surface is not necessary.

One more comment on dust. When sanding wands on a lathe, there is a lot of wood dust. It is anywhere from coarse to fine, and it collects on everything. I make certain I have a very clean lathe when I begin a wand
and then I collect the wood dust in jars. These fine particles are excellent for ritual work when you need an added push. Some of the better wood dusts are ebony, holly, lignum vitae, black walnut, bay, purpleheart, and bloodwood/satine. You may burn the dust on a charcoal in your brazier instead of incense, and the power of the wood will benefit what you are trying to accomplish in circle.

When I am done working for the night, I take down the circle as I clean the floor. I have breathing problems from past work experiences, so I keep my shop as clean as I can. As I dust and vacuum the floor and other areas and move the lathe or other tools back where they are stored, I close and release the energy.

Once a wand is finished, it is placed in its own bag for storage. These are wands that have no outside influence. I try to keep them as clean, pure, and free of external energy as possible.

I've been asked if I sell wands online. I usually won't. If I know the individual well and he or she tells me the kinds of wood that are of interest, I'll send about a half dozen choices. If one works, the customer pays me and sends the rest back. Obviously, I don't do that for everyone. I would have hundreds of wands traveling all over the country daily. I have said it before, and I will close this section with this: The wand chooses the witch. Therefore, you must have the wand and the witch in the same space at the same time. I am fortunate that I have the time and inclination to travel to many shows throughout the year.

In conclusion, find a wand maker you trust. Then allow your wand to find you. Both you and the wand will be happier and more successful for the experience.
Part One

Organic Wands—Woods
People love chopping wood. In this activity one immediately sees results.

—Albert Einstein

Wood. It's the generic term that we all use to denote anything from trees to shrubs to building materials. It's the fallback when we can't think of what else to call something large, green, vascular, and organic. We go to the woods. We build our houses with wood. In golf, even though now they are made of alloys, the fairway clubs are called woods. We create plywood from other pieces of wood. However, how many of us actually think of the kinds of wood that are lumped together to create plywood?

When we go to the lumberyard, do we consider that the framing wood we purchase for home projects are usually No. 2 or No. 3 pine? Do most of us even know the difference between yellow and white pine? Do we realize that the ponderosa or western yellow pine is larger and slower growing than its cousin the white pine?

And what about the oaks, another multiple species? Do we realize that red and white oaks are both specific types and generalizations of groupings? There are over six hundred different oaks, but when we go to the craft stores, there is only one sign for red oak. And without looking at the leaves and/or bark, it's impossible to tell the difference between the types. Even stores that stock specialty woods call their oak Quercus rubra or red oak. Nothing more—just red oak.
As witches, we are very specific about our spells and our rituals. We demand the finest tinctures and oils, the purest herbs, and if possible, we grow everything ourselves. We fill our bookshelves with tomes that explain in detail each and every ingredient that will go into our brazier or cauldron, but when it comes to wands, the books usually say, “walk among the trees and find a piece of wood that suits you.” Really? “Suits you?” Would you dress for ritual in whatever suits you without some research or discussion? I think not, although I have been wrong in that thought before.

Order

When we begin looking at wood we must identify what is usually referred to as some form of vascular plant. The highest classification, or taxonomy, that we will work from in this book is the order. The order of a large number of the vascular plants is Fagales. This order encompasses many of the best-known trees that we derive our working stock from to create our wands.

Family

In the case of oak the family is Fagaceae, which is the beech family. Some of the other families that we will work with are Betulaceae, the birch family; Casuarinaceae, the she-oak family; Juglandaceae, the walnut family; Myricaceae, the bayberry family; and Nothofagaceae, the southern beech family. We will also look at subfamilies such as the Caesalpinioideae, which has as one of its members the heart tree.

Genus

Now back to the red and white oak. The next level under family is genus. The genus of oak is Quercus. All oaks will start with Quercus and then differentiate by species.
Species

Earlier I talked about red and white oaks and how there were a number of different types of each. That is an example of species. The species will give the type of oak, so a *Quercus nigra*, or water oak, which is a white oak will be different than a *Quercus marilandica*, or blackjack oak, which is a red oak.

What does this mean to a witch who is looking for a white or red oak? It means that there are specific differences between the two, and there are easy ways to tell those differences in the wild.

The last area in preparation to beginning your reading is how the trees and shrubs are listed in groupings. For this I am deferring to Carl E. Whitcomb’s *Know It and Grow It II: A Guide to the Identification and Use of Landscape Plants*, which as far as I am concerned is the definitive book on trees and shrubs. Although not as widely used as Michael A. Dirr’s *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Lives*, I find that it is a better guide. Therefore, I shall break the organic part of this book into the following sections: Deciduous Trees; Deciduous Shrubs, Vines, Grasses, and Roots; Broadleaf Evergreens; and Coniferous Trees.

Format of Individual Choices

There must be some commonalities and structure to any book, and this book is no different. Each entry will begin with the common name of the tree in English. Beneath that will be the order, family, genus, and species. Next comes the Janka hardness scale rating, if available (more on this in a moment), followed by the metaphysical properties of the wood or metal—the energy (masculine or feminine), corresponding elements (earth, air, wind, and fire), the corresponding Celtic ogham (if applicable), and finally any Gods or Goddesses attributed to the wood.

A brief discussion of the general characteristics of each plant will follow, and I will explain its benefits, locales, reasons for use, and reasons for caution.
A note on the Janka scale for those who are unfamiliar: The Janka hardness scale is performed by pressing a .444-inch steel ball into a sample of wood until one half of the ball is embedded. Using a specific formula, a rating number is derived from 0 to approximately 5,000. The higher the number, the harder the wood. This rating is usually in relation to flooring and how well a wood will hold up to dents, scratches, and general wear and tear. Another good reason to look at the Janka is because most wands will be turned on a lathe and the hardness of the wood is important to the tools and finishings necessary.

Most of the wooden wands are turned from a piece of stock 16 inches long and 3/4-inch square. The wands that cannot be turned can be hand-fashioned. There shall be no attempt to standardize the shape of the wand other than making it be thicker at the base and tapering the head; the wood will call out its own ultimate shape, however, the tools shall be consistent and the sandings will range from 40 grit to 220 grit dry sandpaper. Each wand will then get a light coating of Scott’s Liquid Gold Wood Cleaner and Preservative to maintain the moisture of the wood and keep it from drying out. No other oils or lacquers will be applied to the wand.

The metal wands will be made in the same manner and roughly the same length, although they will probably be thinner.

In the text you will find the history of the tree, common areas it is found, characteristics specific to the tree, commercial use or value of the tree, and any myths or legends associated with the species. After that will be the reason the wood is important. Rituals and spells will be mentioned, and any magical preparation of the wand will be included, such as turning your ebony wand at the darkest hour of the new moon. There will be no popular culture references of phoenixes, unicorns, or dragons. This is a reference book of actual materials and characteristics.

**Tools Make the Difference**

The tools make the difference. Hand tools and power tools are both just tools of your own two hands and help you realize what you see in your mind. The tools I use on my wands today are the same tools that I grew
up using. I like the Rikon 70-100 12x16-inch mini-lathe. My shop is very small, just half of a two-car garage, so I must condense everything. Also, if you try to turn anything the size of a wand in a tool much longer than 16 inches, it will bow in the middle and you will get bounce and wobble. As it is, the softer woods bounce now, so I have to be extremely cautious not to gouge or snap them.

I had a bench-mounted belt sander for a short time, but it kept burning out. I may have had a bad batch of them from the store, but in any event I went back to my standby. I have a Craftsman belt sander that I flip upside down and put in a vise on my bench. Therefore I have a portable belt sander. My drill press is bench-mounted, as are my chop saw, band saw, and jointer. When I have to mill my wood from rough cut or when I mill tree pieces, I have a table saw, and if I need to plane anything, I mount my 13-inch planer on that.

Unlike my larger power tools, which are ten years old or newer, my hand power tools have been with me for twenty-five-plus years. I have two Craftsman 3/8-inch variable speed drills that I’ve had forever (well, it seems that way). Many of my hand planes and other small tools were from my father and grandfather, so they have been in one family over seventy-five years, either handed down or bought new for less than you can get something discounted now.

Respect Your Source Material

I try very hard not to cut a tree. I will take cuttings from tree trimmers when I know where the wood has come from, and we have some amazing people on the campus of Clemson who always keep me in mind when they trim trees. I also acquire many of my woods from specialty wood suppliers that go out of their way to avoid protected or endangered woods. However, there are times when a tree must be trimmed personally. At that time I look carefully at the tree. I speak to the tree, explain what I am looking for, and why I want it (to teach others about the magnificence of the tree), and then I feel each branch that might be eventually damaging to the growth of the tree and might need to be trimmed.
I have been fortunate that many of the trees on the periphery of the golf course I play regularly are in dire need of trimming. The owner has given me permission to trim them as I see fit, so I usually golf with clippers and duct tape in my bag for trimming and marking genus and species. It’s always amusing to disappear into the woods or wander off the fairway and return a few minutes later with a tree limb sticking out of my golf bag. Those who don’t know me always ask what in the world I’m doing, so that gives me a chance to talk about trees and my particular religion and life path. Most accept it, and those who don’t have never said anything.

I was in Mazatlán playing golf over Thanksgiving and saw a tree that had been cut by the fairway. I had my playing partner, a Mexican businessman, stop the cart and I jumped out and ran over to the pile. I looked at the leaves, the bark, and then back to the leaves. Grabbing a piece about eighteen inches long and two inches in diameter, I threw it in my golf cart, and we played on. Eventually, my playing partner asked what I was doing, and I said I work with wood. He pronounced the wood in Spanish and I in English, and we agreed it was an example of mountain laurel probably planted as a specimen tree by the course’s past owners. I declared it through customs and brought it back to work with. As I said, I pick up wood wherever I go.

The most interesting conversation I had was with a woman about my own age that I met playing golf one day. It was the day I was harvesting poison ivy vines for wands. I mentioned I would play ahead on the sixth hole and meet her on the seventh tee. At the tee I came out of the woods dressed in latex gloves, latex sleeves, and a face mask, and carrying a plastic trash bag. We had a wonderful conversation for the next eleven holes on what the heck you do with a poison ivy wand and why anyone would want one.