

“DIAMOND WILLOW” WALKING STICKS

HUNT HILL NATURE SANCTUARY AND LEARNING CENTER

What is it: “Diamond willow” is not a single species of willow – if you try to look it up in an identification guide, you won’t find it – instead it’s a condition that can affect over a dozen different types of willow across North America. It’s usually found in smaller, brush – sized clumps rather than larger trees. It’s caused by a fungus (from an infection or bacteria or bug?) that causes twigs on a main trunk to die back and the willow responds by building up new wood and bark around the base of that twig in the shape of a diamond.

Locating: Some of the types of willow prefer “dry feet” or roots, but most are found in wet areas such as swamps, marsh edges or ditches. The best time to look though is early spring or late fall, because the leaves form very early and are easy to spot. Leaves also stay on the shrubs until well after all the other brush goes bare. Look across a landscape for the pale green or greenish yellow shrubs sticking up and look closely for the diamond shapes through the bark – better sticks will be straighter and have more diamonds or more varied shapes.

Cleaning: This means de-barking or peeling off the outer bark on the entire stick first. It’s best to do this ASAP – the gray bark easily slips right off. Then clean the outer layer out of each diamond. (If you find badly cracked wood or rotted, dead wood, you may decide to skip any additional work and hunt for a better stick.)

Drying: It’s best to do this slowly so the stick doesn’t crack too much. A cool basement, laying on the garage floor, covering with a tarp or waxing the cut end grains will all help.

Shaping the diamonds: Now the fun starts, as you discover possible double or triple diamonds, “see-throughs,” “diamonds within a diamond” or other new shapes. Some people carve faces into their sticks or shape special handles.

Resources to check out – don’t forget Wikipedia:

- <https://www.itscawoodproducts.com/diamond-willow-wood-products>
- https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-pty-pty_searchbar&hsimp=yhs-pty_searchbar&hspart=pty&p=diamond+willow+walking+sticks#id=1&vid=ef934de2c07c1ed102a68893a812e837&action=click
- <https://www.gardenista.com/products/diamond-willow-walking-sticks/>