

WIND CHECKED BALSA

By Gene Wallock

*From The Winding Stooge, Newsletter of the Nebraska Free
Flighters, Hank Sperzel, Editor*

When Balsa trees are growing, especially the fast growing ones, they are subject to wind bending which actually compresses the grain in some sections. For all practical purposes the compressed wood is broken; it just hasn't fallen apart yet.

A fast way to identify a wind-checked sheet is to hold it up to a florescent light, at an angle, to simulate a reflection and wind-checks show up as a spider web. This wood is good for tips or nonstructural fill in. Strips are harder to identify but may be felt by gently pulling the stick through your fingers putting a slight bend on it. The wind-checked strips will feel like they have facets and will give slightly. You have to be careful doing this in a hobby shop. I remember once I went to my local shop and the owner told me he just got a shipment in of a well known brand of balsa. I held the 1/16 sheet up to a light and every piece I looked at was wind-checked. He returned the wood and got a good replacement.

Another feature to look at is uneven density across the sheet width and length. Hold the sheet up to a fluorescent light like an X-Ray film. The dense areas will show up darker.

If you accidentally used wind checked wood, a light coat of thin CA, on both sides, will make a very good repair.