

ALBIZIA AND RUBBER FOR PLYWOOD TEA CHESTS

H.M. Goonasekara
Timber Care,
Nugegoda.

Annually, over 230 million worth of plywood tea chest panels are imported to Sri Lanka for bulk packing and transport of tea. Despite the fact that a number of alternative bulk packing materials have been developed for the tea industry in the recent past, the popularity and the demand for the traditional tea chest has not declined. In fact the plywood tea chest panel import figures for the past decade shows a steady increase on the consumption level despite the introduction of paper craft and jumbo bags. There is a drastic drop in the level of local production of plywood tea chest panels due to shortages in the supply of soft wood species used for the manufacture purpose. Supply of tea chest panels by the plywood corporation which was the major supplier of panels to the local tea industry came to a halt with its closure in 1998. Now most of the industrial requirement of plywood tea chest panels are being imported. Although a few local entrepreneurs started manufacturing tea chest panels mainly for their own consumption, it faces severe competition due to cheap and low quality imported panels. However, a much cheaper and better quality panel for tea chest can be successfully manufactured, using the locally available albizia and rubber wood. A better grade of plywood panel than the ones imported and sold in the market for Rs. 140.00 per set, can be manufactured locally for Rs. 88.00. Since the small scale tea chest panel manufacturing is labour intensive and involves only low technology, the industry can provide job opportunities to a considerable number of semi and unskilled workers.