

Sink or Swim: Which tree floats the longest?

We wanted to find out if a dense timber (such as oak) would absorb less water over time compared to a lightweight timber such as poplar. We were trying to find out which species would make the best raft, so the study grew to include the shape of tree trunks in different environments and which would be the easiest to cut.



A growing tree is very dense and can have a moisture content of 80%. Our fresh green wood samples mostly sank after a few days, even in salty water. Once we had dried our samples to <25% moisture we found out that sycamore absorbed the least water and floated the longest. It also grows straight in woodlands and is easy to cut. Sycamore would make a good raft.