ENGLISH WOODS
FOUR GREAT PERIODS OF ENGLISH FURNITURE
(Note that provincial woods (local timbers) include applewood, rosewood, beech, cherry, cedar, elm were also used)

OAK
Periods
● Elizabethan
● Jacobean
● Commonwealth
● Restoration (walnut was increasingly being utilized; oak became restricted to country furniture and to carcases of fine and veneered furniture)

Construction
● Most oak used during these periods was either plain sawn (cut parallel with the diameter of the trunk) or not quarter cut

Tidbits
● Bog oak (wood preserved in bogs of peat; nearly black in color) was used as an inlay with holly, sycamore, poplar, beech, ash, yew, and fruit woods for much of the main oak period.
● Elm was often used for tablespops
● Ash and beech were often used for chairs
● Yew was often used for turned chairs
● Oak fell out of favor during the last half of the 17th C, but was used in provincial furniture
● Victorians admired oak for its sturdy qualities and it was used in Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts furniture

WALNUT
Types of Walnut
● English walnut
  - supposedly introduced by the Romans when Britain was an Imperial province
  - comparatively scarce today, but its exquisite figure makes it greatly prized
  - regarded as particularly precious
  - its use in Britain before the latter part of the seventeenth century is rare
● Italian walnut
  - inferior in beauty of figure to the English variety
  - easy to work with
● American black walnut
  - finely marked timber
  - easy to work with
  - less susceptible to worm attack
● Satin walnut
  - used for cheaper varieties of furniture
  - hard to work with (inclined to warp, twist, split)

Periods
● 1626 - Francis Bacon refers to walnut as a wood well suited to tables, cupboards, and desks
● Restoration period ©. 1660 - 1730) walnut was the popular hardwood for fine furniture
  - mostly wood imported from France
- some native walnut trees grown in the south of England ("Juglans regia")
- severe winter of 1709 caused importers to look to Virginia where a darker "black" walnut wood was to be found ("Juglans nigra")
- walnut was usually used as a veneer on case furniture
- walnut was a solid wood for chairs and table legs
- fancy veneers (oyster, burr)
- walnut was susceptible to work attack
- walnut was not as sturdy as oak
- few antique pieces have survived the ages
- Walnut use declined after 1730 and by around 1750 it was replaced by mahogany

- Victorian (circa 1850)
  - walnut was used as a solid for chairs and as a veneer on case furniture and table tops
  - walnut worked better for marquetry decoration than mahogany or rosewood

MAHOGANY

Periods
- Georgian
  - After around 1730 walnut declined except in some cabinets, chests, bureaux, clock cases
    - By 1750 mahogany was the dominant hardwood
      - first mainly for chairs and tables
      - later in the 18th C for veneering on case furniture
    - By 1770 more exotic woods (satinwood and rosewood) became popular
- Currently
    - Remains popular through the 19th and 20th C
      - easy to work with
      - can be polished to a beautiful luster

Suppliers
- Earliest supplier - West Indian Islands of Puerto Rico and San Domingo ("Spanish mahogany")
  - dark, closely grained, somewhat formless
- Later supplier - Cuba
  - redder, more marked grain pattern.
- Latest supplier - Honduras (called “Baywood”)
  - lighter color
  - inferior quality to the Cuban mahogany
- Present suppliers
  - India (introduced in the late 18th C)
  - Central America
  - French West Africa and the Gold Coast
    - durable wood, but is liable to twist

SATINWOOD

Period
- Late Georgian / Neoclassical
  - Revival of marquetry work preferred a lighter, more exotic wood
- After 1760 - exotic West Indian satinwood were imported
  - yellow appearance
  - fine and plain grained
  - richly figured
- After 1780 - East Indies satinwood was imported
  - cloudy, grainless look when polished.
- Both used as veneer and inlay and occasionally as a solid
(Satinwood furniture of this period had a light golden yellowish patina which has now mellowed to a rich honey)
- 1800 - 1820 satinwood was gradually replaced by rosewood

Note
● Both birch and chestnut resemble satinwood to a great extent and these woods were often used as substitutes for satinwood in the late 18th C.