

Cedar vs. larch cladding: Compared

Introduction to cedar and larch cladding species

Cedar can refer to a number of sub species, but the most popular for outdoor construction and cladding purposes is Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*). This is, in part, down to its excellent natural decay resistance and stability. An evergreen conifer, the species is native to the west coast of North America and Canada. The trees can grow up to 230 metres.

One of the most prominent larch species for cladding is Siberian Larch (*Larix sibirica*), a premier softwood originating from — you guessed it — Siberia. Also known as Russian Larch, this slow-growing tree is native to a very cold climate, reaching up to 50 metres when mature. Due to this slow growth rate, Siberian Larch has a number of very useful and interesting properties for cladding.

Appearance

Western Red Cedar is a beautiful, highly sought-after timber. The species comes in a variety of eye catching colours, ranging from dark chocolate brown to light pink, sometimes with a darker red streak. Grain patterns can vary to quite an extent, from close and straight to open and wild. A good cedar will be of a clear grade, which means it contains very few knots.



Western Red Cedar cladding — sought after for its unique reddish-brown hues.

Siberian Larch is known for its straw yellow appearance and with its slow growth time, it has tight growth rings and a fine grain, adding aesthetic allure.

Like all timber over time, Siberian Larch weathers to a silvery-grey, but this can be stopped and the original colour retained with a good UV treatment. The Siberian Larch cladding we stock is sorted into two grades, Grade A (unsorted I-III) and Grade B (sawfalling I-V), with the former having fewer knots than the latter.



Siberian Larch cladding — a favourite for its characterful appearance.

Both Western Red Cedar and Siberian Larch are famed for their own unique colours and textures — but which do you see fitting your project best? Bear in mind that both can be painted or stained to fit a certain look.

Interestingly, many designers and architects are also purposely seeking a weathered, silvery-grey look for their cladding. Both cedar and larch are great for achieving this natural grey look if left untreated once installed.

Durability, stability & performance

Both timbers perform well for durability, stability and rot resistance, being suited well to external cladding applications.

Being fairly lightweight with a dry density of 370kg/m^3 , Western Red Cedar isn't the hardest wood on the market but is still very robust for cladding thanks to its excellent natural decay, rot resistance and stability.

Siberian Larch is durable and strong. Thanks to its very slow growth time in an extreme climate, Siberian Larch timber is resinous and dense — 590kg/m^3 , in fact — making it denser and stronger than cedar, although with marginally less stability. Due to the high resin content, larch is hard and the perfect choice for exposed cladding projects where there may be physical contact.



Working qualities, maintenance & treatment

As a lightweight timber, Western Red Cedar has very good working qualities. Siberian Larch is also known for its fine workability, with good sawing and finishing properties. For both Western Red Cedar and Siberian Larch, make sure to use stainless steel fixings. This avoids corrosion as well as the wood being stained.

Because of their natural resistance to rot and decay, both cedar and larch can be left without any treatment, and require very little maintenance. Beware, however, that if this is the path you go down, both species will eventually turn to a silvery-grey.

To retain their original colour or to alter the colour, cedar and larch can be easily painted, stained or finished. Depending on the type of finish, this usually only needs reapplying every few years



Silvery-grey 'weathered' cladding has recently grown in popularity. Without treatment, cedar and larch will naturally achieve this look.