

Cedar baths

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A precision-joined cedar wooden bath is the equivalent of the finest piece of furniture and must be accorded the same amount of care and attention from the day it arrives until it ends its useful life.

1 Cedar

Cedar is an excellent material from which to make a bath. It contains resins which inhibit the growth of bacteria and mold and resists insect attack. It also has a high insulation value. The 40mm thick panels are dressed, knot-free, air dried, stored in a temperate environment then carefully selected and matched. (Appendix A)

2 Size

All the cedar baths are custom-made to order. Currently the minimum size is 100cm x 77cm x 66cm deep and the maximum size is 140cm x 77cm x 66cm deep (external measurements) although some changes are possible to these limits. The dry weight empty is approx 80-90kg.

3 Design

The corners are square, the walls are vertical, the floor is flat and there are two 40mm high cedar skids/rails attached to the underside for support and ventilation.

4 Handling/arrival

Cedar is a sensitive material and therefore the cedar baths should be handled with clean white cotton gloves the Japanese way. Upon arrival the packaging should be removed to ensure a firm grip on the bath. Stress should be avoided. It should never be dropped, impacted heavily, twisted or vibrated.

If a trolley is used, it should be covered with rubber or very thick and soft material and the bath tied to the trolley with rope (which doesn't make direct contact with the cedar). Upon arrival, if this occurs during summer and after a long journey, it is wise to rehydrate by rubbing inside and out with a wet towel or sponge. Thereafter it should be rewrapped until required.

5 Storage

If it is to be stored in the cooler months for less than a week pending installation, it is fine, but for a longer period such as holidays and particularly in the warmer months, the storage environment should be as temperate as possible. Receptacles such as buckets should be filled with water and placed on the floor of the bath and the bath then wrapped and sealed with plastic (particularly along the bottom edge), the water level checked as often as necessary.

Small receptacles such as tumblers filled with water should be placed between the plastic covering and the walls so that the moisture is trapped and envelops all the external and internal wall surfaces. Small objects on the top edge of the walls will allow the flow of air around the bath. There may be minor condensation stains but these are washed away when the bath is next used.

6 Location

The space allocated for the bath should be protected from direct sunlight and well ventilated. Ideally the environment is temperate and double glazing would be most advantageous. The floor should be stable and able to support a tonne distributed by the two skids/rails. The space should not be outdoors, floor heaters should not be used and air-conditioning controlled or blocked. If close to a shower, a shower screen is essential. Clearance from walls should be no less than 10mm. The design of the space, its materials and fittings should be compatible and preferably natural. Cedar lining boards are excellent for walls and ceilings and slate or low-fired and unglazed ceramics ideal for the floor.

7 Drainage

The floor area close to the bath's outlet should be provided with adequate drainage. The options are many including long and narrow grates and channels along the edge of the room made from stainless steel, a floor outlet at the lower end.

The outflow from the bath outlet is restricted as it is less than 10 mm above the floor. If it's necessary to further stem this outflow, this can be achieved simply with a baffle such as a ceramic tile. The outlet is drilled wherever required (to suit standard fittings), the exact location to be provided after payment. A 'pop-up' chrome-plated fitting is provided with the bath.

A Japanese bath is very different from a Western-style bath. The water remains clean after multiple use and therefore some regulations are not applicable. If it is preferred that the bath utilize orthodox plumbing and drainage, this can be done by either providing a loose sleeve arrangement within the floor outlet or enough space to connect/disconnect to the plumbing, both methods enabling the bath to be removed for cleaning and sealing and then returned to the normal position. There is another option favoured in Japan (where the outlet of the bath is not directly over the floor outlet) in which an elbow and a flexible hose is attached to the bath outlet and this hose runs to the floor outlet. Further information is available if required. Those responsible for the installation should be conversant with the local regulations.

8 Installation

When installed and after sealing and cleaning, the floor should provide a stable and flat plane and the bath must have zero movement. Drainage should be tested and where there is a baffle it may need to be modified to ensure the correct emptying rate.

9 Conditions

The bath should be always in a constantly temperate state, defined as cool and moist, with the humidity approximately 50%. Such is a frequently used bathroom. The cedar's moisture content therefore is always stable and reasonably high. Used at least 3 times a week, the bath should be adequately hydrated. Should the bath not be used regularly, these conditions are still required. Wood is always responding to its environment, swelling when it's humid and shrinking when it's dry and these changes can damage precision joinery.

When the temperature is above 25 degrees and the humidity rises above 60% or drops below 40% within the same day, it is imperative to change the environment by modifying the ventilation and the moisture level or if necessary covering the bath (If the changes are for a prolonged period, see 'Storage' above).

An excellent Japanese-made hygrometer/thermometer for measuring humidity and temperature is purchased (at cost only) with the bath. It is analogue, does not require batteries and is an accurate and reliable indication of the environment of the bathroom. Note the safe levels marked in green.

10 Daily use

A cedar bath can withstand the maximum temperature permissible for hot water supplied by approved systems now available in Australia (but not from the uncontrolled solar hot water systems). Hot water should not flow directly onto the cedar but be mixed with cold water in the first instance.

After using the bath it must then be emptied as is normal with all baths and any remaining water towelled off. It must not be left filled.

Cedar (and wood generally) is almost the perfect insulator, equivalent to styrene: the water can be 40 degrees C while the external surface will be at room temperature. However if the water is to be kept hot for multiple use in the evening Japanese-style, a cover is necessary. Cedar panels can be placed along the top and a two-part cedar cover is available for purchase. The surface of the water can be covered with a tight fitting sheet of 12mm EVA/PE foam (blue) available from retail outlets (Clark Rubber etc.).

Wood is always moving, shrinking and expanding as if it were still alive. Over the years, a wood surface such as cedar that is often wet can develop a fine 'fur' on the surface that can be left and ignored or lightly sanded off.

11 Cleaning

The cleaning required is little more than that which is necessary for a conventional plastic bath. It is presumed the bath will be freestanding. This enables proper care and cleaning of all surfaces and movement of the bath within the space.

There is likely to be sediment remaining after using the bath which should be lathered with a soft soap and rinsed off (and again any remaining water towelled off.).

It should be remembered that there is almost always moisture under a wooden bath, either a small amount of seepage from the cedar or from the overflow of bath water and therefore access ensures these areas can be kept clean. The frequency of cleaning depends on the frequency of use, personal preference, the climate, the drainage and the nature of the floor surface. Used regularly, every 6-12 months should be reasonable.

12 Sealing

The natural sealant is beeswax dissolved in pure turpentine (derived from pine trees) and should be wiped on all the surfaces, preferably before it's first filling, particularly the end grain and underneath (this requires the bath to be laid on its side on a soft surface such as a blanket to protect the cedar from damage).

The sealant should be applied with a soft cloth, excess wiped off and the bath returned to the horizontal position. This should occur initially every 3 months for the first year and thereafter at least twice per year depending on how often the bath is used.
(See Appendix B)

When cleaned, sealed and properly installed, the bath can be used and enjoyed without any concern.

13 Soap/additives

Soaps are alkaline and in time can bleach the cedar although the damage can be reversed. The sealant offers some protection. None of the bath additives including bath salts and aromatic oils will be injurious but therapeutic chemicals such as washing soda and Epsom salts should be tested for their pH first. Other chemicals and abrasives should be avoided.

14 Safety

The top of a cedar bath is approx. 660mm or more above the floor and therefore the safest way to enter and leave a Japanese bath is to sit on the edge and swing one's legs in or out. A handrail is therefore advisable close to the anticipated point of entry.

15 Holidays

The cedar bath must remain in a temperate state at all times and therefore windows that are not double glazed should be covered. See 'Storage' above.

16 Accessories

- * Two-part cedar lid to fit, 18mm thickness, dressed
- * Removable cedar backrest, 18mm thickness, located with stainless steel pins
- * 'Sunoko' cedar bath mat, 18mm thickness, dressed
- * 'Koshikake' cedar stool, 40mm thickness, dressed
- * 'Arai-oke' sawara washbasin with copper bands, made in Japan
- * 'Te-oke' sawara ladle with copper bands, made in Japan

17 Transport

The baths are wrapped in polythene, packed in craftboard and attached to a pallet for safe handling by a forklift. We personally deliver each bath to Melbourne addresses or the Melb. freight depot. On arrival at the property interstate, it is unloaded with a hydraulic tailgate, thereafter assistance will be required to carry it safely inside. The bath should be unwrapped for carrying and rewrapped when inside. The purchaser can pick up the bath from the carrier's depot at reduced cost.

The carrier is very professional with an impeccable record. Insurance however is optional and the responsibility of the purchaser.

18 Wooden baths in Japan

The Japanese people have a great love for craftsmanship, wood and baths. The making of wooden baths in Japan therefore has a long history and it remains the world centre for their production and enjoyment. There are more than 20 companies making them and an unknown and decreasing number of independent craftsmen, most of whom employ the traditional joinery techniques.

19 Guarantee

Given the need for great care of a cedar Japanese bath, its condition and performance depend entirely on the purchaser and therefore a guarantee cannot be given.

The craftsmen who make the cedar baths utilize the best materials and workmanship and if they are looked after according to the information provided, should last for decades. In Japan on average a wooden bath will last 10-15 years. If they are used daily and the necessary care and maintenance is exercised, they should last more than double that time.

Do not hesitate to contact us with any queries or concerns.

The Japanese Bath Company
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Appendix A

Cedar should be handled carefully as it is quite soft. Light scratches can be easily sanded off (200 grit) and indentations can usually be removed when dry by placing a globule of water in the centre for a few hours. Cedar is a very colourful wood, one of its most attractive features. During the first and second fillings of the bath, some of its natural colouring, particularly from the darker tones, can be released, is harmless, but if preferred, the bath can be emptied and refilled. It will not stain. Cedar is not darkened by the sealant and ages to a muted brown colour which is maintained if it is not exposed to sunlight or attacked by soap, detergent and other chemicals. Protective coatings are not advisable as they soon degrade and become ineffective and unattractive.

Appendix B

The beeswax/pure turpentine sealant is entirely natural, invisible, waterproof, a pleasant aroma, penetrates deeply and is protective of the cedar. The pure turpentine disappears completely and therefore there is no residual aroma or the possibility of an allergy. The ingredients are natural, easy to purchase in Australia (Bunnings...) at very little cost and it's easy to make.

The mixture is very thin (2-3 teaspoons in a cup) and is applied by wiping with a soft cloth. It cannot harm one's hands. The beeswax, when grated, quickly dissolves in the turpentine. It can easily be stored and does not age. All the natural oils ideal for wood such as linseed and sunflower will intermix easily but make the cedar slippery and darken the cedar.

The wax has a melting point of approx 66 degrees C (the highest of all the waxes) and therefore is not affected significantly by the hot water. Initially applied every 3 months, the amount of wax in the wood will gradually increase and be more and more protective. The purchaser can allow the surface to become 'waxy' if they wish by mixing more wax into the pure turps and applying more often which will enable a beautiful polish.