

RedEdge LVL vs Plain Timber

Choosing edge forms for concrete slabs and footings — why a purpose-built engineered edgeboard makes for a straighter, cleaner, reusable edge.

Purpose-designed formwork LVL edgeboards — like Big River's RedEdge — are made specifically to form the perimeter edge of a concrete slab or footing, setting both the slab thickness and the finished edge line. They're used the same way a formworker uses sawn timber lengths (on edge, held by stakes at centres and braced), but they're engineered to do the job better and last longer. This guide compares them to plain timber so you can pick the right edge form for the job.

PRODUCT

RedEdge engineered
formwork LVL edgeboard

USE

Slab & footing edge
forms / screed rail

SUPPORT

Formwork advice at
your local branch

1 · What is a Formwork LVL Edgeboard?

A formwork LVL edgeboard is an engineered edge form: a laminated veneer lumber board manufactured specifically to run around the perimeter of a slab or footing pour. Set on edge and held by stakes and braces, it does two jobs at once — it sets the **slab thickness** (its depth) and it defines the **finished edge line** of the concrete. Big River's RedEdge is a purpose-built example, typically supplied with a sealed or coated face so it strips clean and can be reused.

It is used the same way a formworker has always used sawn timber lengths, but the difference is in the material. Plain hardwood or pine is a natural product that springs, bows and moves; an engineered edgeboard is made to stay straight, hold its dimension and last across many pours.

The screed-rail idea. The concreter screeds and floats the slab off the top of the edgeboard, so the edge form doubles as a screed rail. A straight, rigid edge gives a flat, level slab with far less floating and trowelling to correct high and low spots — which is the core 'ease of finishing' benefit of an engineered board. A wavy timber edge produces a wavy screed and more rework.

What a good edge form has to do

- **Stay dead straight** under the pressure of wet concrete pushing against it between stakes.
- **Hold an accurate, repeatable depth** so the slab meets the engineer's specified thickness and cover.
- **Give a clean, sharp edge (arris)** and a true screed rail so finishing is fast and the result is flat.
- **Strip cleanly and survive** to be used again — the difference between a cost per length and a cost per pour.

2 · RedEdge LVL vs Plain Timber at a Glance

RedEdge LVL The engineered edge form		Plain Timber The traditional edge	
Straightness	High, consistent	Straightness	Springs, bows, twists
Edge finish	Crisp, sharp arris	Edge finish	Wavy, more rework
Moisture	Sealed — low uptake	Moisture	Absorbs & swells
Depth accuracy	Tight tolerance	Depth accuracy	Variable sizing
Reuses	Many pours	Reuses	~1–2 uses
Upfront cost	Higher per length	Upfront cost	Lower per length

A quick orientation, not a spec sheet. RedEdge is engineered to win on straightness, finish and reuse; plain timber wins only on upfront price. The rest of this guide explains where each makes sense.

3 · RedEdge LVL — Features, Benefits & Applications

RedEdge is a purpose-built formwork LVL edgeboard engineered to form a straight, accurate, reusable concrete edge — and to make the concreter's finishing work faster. It is the edge form for formworkers running slab after slab.

Features

- Engineered LVL with a high, consistent modulus of elasticity for reliable stiffness.
- Sealed / coated face that resists bleed water and strips clean from cured concrete.
- Manufactured to tight tolerances and a consistent depth for repeatable slab thickness.
- Long, uniform, straight lengths — lighter and more consistent to handle than dense hardwood.

Benefits

- **Straightness & stiffness under load** — stays dead straight and resists bowing when wet concrete pushes against it between stakes, so no waves in the slab edge.
- **A true screed rail** — screeding and floating off a straight, rigid edge gives a flat, level slab with far less floating and trowelling to correct.
- **Clean, crisp edges** — a smooth sealed face leaves a sharp, consistent arris with minimal grinding, patching or filling afterwards.
- **Low moisture absorption & dimensional stability** — doesn't soak up bleed water, so it won't swell, distort, or draw moisture out of the slab edge (which can cause edge cracking or staining).
- **Dimensional accuracy = compliance** — accurate, repeatable depth helps meet the engineer's specified slab thickness and cover.
- **Reusability = lower cost-per-pour** — strips cleanly and is reused across many pours, spreading the higher purchase price over many jobs.
- **Faster set-out & less waste** — uniform straight lengths set out quickly, need less packing and shimming, and there's no culling of knotty or bowed boards.

Typical applications

- Perimeter edge forms for residential slabs and footings.
- Commercial and industrial slab pours where a flat, compliant, crisp edge matters.
- High-throughput slab work — pouring slab after slab where reuse and set-out speed drive cost.
- Any pour where finishing quality and edge compliance are worth protecting.

4 · Plain Timber — Where It Still Fits

Plain sawn timber has formed concrete edges for generations, and it still has a place. It's the honest trade-off: the upfront cost per length is lower than engineered board, so for the right job it can be the cheaper choice. The key is knowing where its limits start to cost you.

Where plain timber makes sense

- One-off or single pours, where there's no reuse to spread an engineered board's cost over.
- Small, short or highly irregular runs where offcuts are unavoidable anyway.
- Jobs where the finished edge quality is not critical and some grinding or patching is acceptable.
- Situations where lowest upfront material cost is the deciding factor.

The limitations to weigh

- **Movement under load** — hardwood or pine springs, bows and twists under pour pressure, putting waves in the slab edge and needing more stakes and braces.
- **More finishing rework** — a wavy timber edge makes a wavy screed, so the concreter spends more time floating and trowelling out high and low spots.
- **Moisture movement** — timber absorbs bleed water, swells and moves during the pour, and can draw moisture from the slab edge, risking edge cracking or staining.
- **Variable sizing** — inconsistent depth can leave slabs under- or over-thickness against the engineer's spec.
- **Short service life** — often only one or two uses before it's warped, split or concrete-fouled, plus rough sawn faces leave grain imprints and ragged edges.

The honest trade-off. For a single one-off pour, plain timber can be the cheaper option. RedEdge earns its keep as volume rises — the labour saved in set-out, the reduction in grinding and edge rework, and the many reuses add up to a lower total cost and a better finish for a formworker running slab after slab.

5 · Key Differences Explained

Both form an edge. The difference is what kind of edge, and at what total cost. The table sets the two side by side across the things that matter on a slab job.

What matters	RedEdge LVL	Plain Timber	Why it matters
Straightness & stiffness	Stays dead straight under load	Springs, bows & twists	A straight edge = a straight slab line
Finishing (screed rail)	Flat, level screed off a rigid edge	Wavy screed, more rework	Less floating & trowelling to correct
Edge quality (arris)	Sharp, crisp, consistent	Ragged, grain imprints	Minimal grinding, patching, filling
Moisture behaviour	Sealed — low absorption	Absorbs, swells, moves	Avoids edge cracking / staining
Depth accuracy	Tight, repeatable tolerance	Variable sizing	Meets specified slab thickness & cover
Reusability	Many pours	~1–2 uses	Drives the true cost-per-pour
Set-out & waste	Fast, uniform, little culling	Packing, shimming, culling	Labour and material saved on site
Upfront cost	Higher per length	Lower per length	The one area timber wins

A qualitative comparison of edge-forming behaviour. Confirm sizes, depths and suitability for your specific pour with your Big River branch.

Reading the comparison

The chain runs one way: stiffness holds the board straight, a straight board is a true screed rail, and a true screed rail is a flat slab with a clean edge and less rework. Plain timber breaks that chain the moment it bows or swells. The economics then flip on reuse — a coated edgeboard stripped and run again across many pours turns a higher price per length into a lower cost per pour, while timber is usually spent after a use or two.

6 · Key Selection Criteria

Choosing between an engineered edgeboard and plain timber comes down to a few practical questions. Work through them together.

Criterion	What to weigh
Pour volume & reuse	The single biggest factor. One-off pour with no reuse? Plain timber may be cheaper. Slab after slab? RedEdge's many reuses drive the cost-per-pour down and quickly overtake timber.
Finish quality required	If a flat slab and a sharp, crisp edge matter — as they do on most residential and commercial work — the straight screed rail of an engineered board saves hours of floating, trowelling and grinding.
Slab-thickness compliance	Where the engineer specifies a slab depth and cover, the tight, repeatable depth of an engineered board helps you hit it. Variable timber sizing risks under- or over-thickness slabs.
Labour on site	Straighter boards need fewer stakes and braces, set out faster, and cut grinding and edge rework. Cost the labour, not just the board — labour is usually where the saving is.
Moisture & pour conditions	For quality-critical or larger pours, a sealed board that won't swell or wick moisture from the slab edge protects the finish and avoids edge cracking or staining.
Handling & waste	Long, uniform, lighter lengths reduce packing, shimming and the culling of knotty or bowed boards — less waste and easier handling than dense hardwood.
Total cost of ownership	Compare cost per pour, not price per length. Add up reuses, labour saved and rework avoided across the run of jobs — that's where an engineered board makes its case.
Sizing & supply	Match the board depth to your slab thickness and confirm lengths and availability with your branch. Big River can advise on the right RedEdge profile for the job.

7 · Summary Comparison

The main points at a glance. A quick reference for picking the right edge form.

Aspect	RedEdge LVL	Plain Timber
Positioning	Purpose-built engineered edge form	Traditional sawn edge
Straightness	Dead straight, consistent	Springs, bows, twists
Slab finish	Flat slab, crisp edge, less rework	Wavy edge, more grinding
Moisture	Sealed, stable	Absorbs & swells
Depth / compliance	Tight, repeatable	Variable
Reuses	Many pours	~1–2 uses
Set-out / waste	Fast, low waste	Slower, more culling
Upfront cost	Higher per length	Lower per length
Cost per pour	Lower over volume	Higher once reuse is lost
Best for	Volume / quality-critical slab work	One-off, low-spec pours

Bottom line: Plain timber forms an edge; a purpose-built RedEdge LVL edgeboard forms a **straight, accurate, reusable** edge that makes the concreter's finishing work faster and the result cleaner. For a one-off pour, timber can be cheaper — but for high-throughput residential and commercial slab work, RedEdge wins on finish and on total cost per pour.

Talk to Big River

Our branch teams can size the right RedEdge profile to your slab thickness, sort lengths and quantities, and price your job fast.

Get a quote or find your nearest location at bigrivergroup.com.au · 25 locations · 130+ years · Australian Made

Important. This guide is a general product and application reference for Australian formworkers and builders, and is not engineering advice. Product performance depends on correct board depth, stake and brace spacing, installation and pour conditions. Edge-form selection, slab thickness and cover should follow the project engineer's design and the relevant Australian Standards and the National Construction Code. Confirm the right RedEdge profile, sizes and suitability for your specific pour with Big River and the product data. © 2026 Big River Group.