








Betula nigra

River Birch, Red Birch

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic

Noted for beautiful, exfoliating bark and multiple trunks, River Birch is an excellent food source for wildlife, supporting hundreds of species of moths, butterflies, and songbirds. It is commonly found in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain of the Mid-Atlantic Region from Pennsylvania to Virginia.



| Tree | Male and Female Flowers, Tree Forms, Bark |
|--|--|
| Height: 50–70 feet |   |
| Spread: 35–50 feet | |
| Bloom Color: Yellow-green from April-May | |
| Characteristics | |
| Fast-growing, deciduous tree with single or (more desirable) multiple trunks, irregular crown |   |
| Oval or triangular leaves 1–1½ inches long, alternate, simple | |
| Male flowers: 2–3 inches long, red-green catkins | |
| Female flowers: ¼–½ inch long, light-green upright catkins, which become cone-like fruits | |
| Young trunks have exfoliating, reddish bark; older trunks are a deeply furrowed gray with pink tints |    |
| Attributes | |
| Tolerates clay soil, wet soil, drier soil, compacted sites, heat, and air pollution; intolerant of shade | |
| Greater pest and disease resistance than other birches; deer rarely damage | |
| Attractive bark peels in papery layers to reveal multiple colors, providing interest in winter & snow | Excellent Replacement for |
| Attracts birds to its seeds; larval host of the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail and Red-spotted Purple butterflies and numerous moth species | |
| Growing and Maintenance Tips | |
| Soil Requirements: Humus-rich, acidic soil | |
| Light Requirements: Sun, Partial Shade | <i>Allanthus altissima</i> - Tree of Heaven |
| Water Requirements: Moist, Wet | <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> - European Alder |
| Use as a lawn tree, in rain gardens (larger than 150 sq ft) or on stream banks (to control erosion) | <i>Pyrus calleryana</i> - Callery (Bradford) Pear |
| Hardiness: USDA Zones 4–9 | <i>Salix babylonica</i> - Weeping Willow |
| <i>developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria</i> | |

Images by Mary Free (catkins, bare tree) CT College Arboretum; by Elaine Mills, Fairlington Community Center, Green Spring Gardens, Rockville, MD, and Meadowlark Botanical Gardens; and by Christa Watters (bark, left), Alexandria, VA