




# 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: Yellowish, green from April-May	
<b>Characteristics</b>	
Fast-growing, <a href="#">deciduous</a> tree with single trunk or multi- <a href="#">stemmed</a> (more desirable), irregular crown	 
<a href="#">Alternate</a> , <a href="#">pinnately-veined</a> , oval or triangular 1–1½” long leaves with doubly-serrate margins	
Male flower: 2–3” long, gold-red pendulous catkin	
Female flower: light-green upright catkin becomes cone-like aggregate of <a href="#">samaras</a> w/ <a href="#">persistent</a> style	
Exfoliating <a href="#">bark</a> ages from smooth reddish color to papery multicolor to deeply furrowed gray w/ pink tints	  
<b>Attributes</b>	
Tolerates <a href="#">clay</a> 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 layers to reveal multiple colors & <a href="#">lenticels</a> , providing interest in winter & snow	<b>Excellent Replacement for</b>
Attracts birds to its seeds; <a href="#">larval</a> host of the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail and Red-spotted Purple butterflies and numerous moth species	
<b>Growing and Maintenance Tips</b>	
<a href="#">Soil Requirements</a> : <a href="#">Humus</a> -rich, acidic soil	
<a href="#">Light Requirements</a> : Sun, Partial Shade	<a href="#">Alnus glutinosa</a> - European Alder
<a href="#">Water Requirements</a> : Moist, Wet	<a href="#">Salix alba</a> , <a href="#">S. fragilis</a> - White Willow, Crack Willow
Use as a lawn tree, in rain gardens (larger than 150 sq ft) or on stream banks (to control erosion)	<a href="#">Salix babylonica</a> - Weeping Willow
<a href="#">Hardiness</a> : USDA Zones 4–9	<a href="#">Ulmus parviflora</a> , <a href="#">U. pumila</a> - Elms, Chinese, Siberian
<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