

# Paper Birch

*Betula papyrifera*

Canoe Birch

Paper Birch is a medium sized, fast growing tree found in the north on cool, moist sites. It is the tree of birchbark canoes, birch beer, and baskets. Commonly found in mixed hardwood-conifer forests, they may be found in pure stands, especially on sites disturbed by fire. Paper Birch is short lived and rarely lives more than 100 years. Commercially, the lumber is used for veneer, pulpwood, and many specialty items. The handsome foliage and showy white bark make the trees attractive as landscape specimens. Paper Birch is also an important browse plant for mammals and the seeds, buds, and bark and all eaten by wildlife.



## Identification

### Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, simple, pinnately veined, ovate, coarsely doubly serrate margins, acute tip, rounded base, green turning yellow/gold in autumn.



### Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; inconspicuous, late spring, maturing to a cone-like, cylindrical 1-1 1/2 inch, deciduous at maturity, releasing 2-winged nutlets in autumn or winter.



### Bark/Wood

Smooth, thin, chalky to creamy white, peeling in horizontal papery strips. Trunk often black and furrowed at base. Orange inner bark.



### Form

Medium sized tree with pyramidal or irregular crown. Generally a shallow rooted tree. Trunk/branches often storm damaged.



### Uses

Birch wood is moderately dense and chips are used in pulp and paper manufacture and fuel. Sap used to make beer and syrup. Used to revegetate disturbed sites. Prized species for landscape and ornamental planting.

### Ethnobotany

Native Americans used sap to make beer and syrup. Teas were made from inner bark. Bark used to make canoes and baskets. The bark has been used to make casts for broken bones. Medicinally used to treat dysentery and as antiseptic.

### Native Distribution

Newfoundland west to Alaska. Found in northern New England, Great Lakes, and Washington.

### Establishment

Do not prune in summer as Paper Birch is a "bleeder" and should not be pruned when sap is flowing.

## Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 80'Hx30'Wx2'dbh  
 USDA Zone  
 Light Requirements Part to Full Sun

Soils Diverse  
 Drought Tolerant? Yes  
 Inundation Tolerant? Moderate

### Pests/Damaging Agents

Bronze birch borer is most serious pest of Paper Birch and attacks weakened trees. Tent caterpillar can defoliate. Decay causing fungi common after damage. Girdling from animals.

### Similar Species

Gray Birch  
 The bark of Paper Birch exfoliates frequently and easily while Gray Birch bark is taut. The leaf of Paper Birch is much more ovate.

### Propagation

Seed - no pretreatment necessary. Softwood cuttings. Layering.

### Source(s)

Orion Farms, Philadelphia, NY.