

River Birch (*Betula nigra*)

There are many species of birch native to the northern hemisphere. *Betula nigra* is one native to flood plains and swamps of the eastern US. This primarily streambank tree is most abundant in the hot, humid Southeast, but ranges from New England to northern Florida, and as far west as southern Minnesota and east Texas. This tree usually goes by the common name River Birch but it is sometime referred to as water birch. The species name *nigra* refers to the black color of the mature bark of the wild species.

The River Birch has limited usefulness for timber but because of its graceful form and attractive bark it is frequently used in ornamental plantings in decidedly less moist conditions from which it originated, especially at the northern and western extremes of its natural range. It is one of the very best fast-growing shade trees, valued as a landscape tree for the colorful exfoliating bark which is particularly noticeable in the winter. It is one of the most culturally adaptable and heat tolerant of the birches and a good substitute for pest-prone paper and white birches. Another appealing feature is the shimmering contrast when the leaves flutter in the wind, revealing a lower leaf surface of a different color than the upper surface.

The River Birch is a medium to tall tree, growing 60-80 feet at maturity and about 40 feet wide. They typically live 50 -75 years. While attractive, this tree does not serve well as a street tree. They can grow very big and Aphids love to feed on it emitting a sticky sugary film that settles on cars.