



Betula nigra

river birch

Family *Betulaceae*

Origin Native

WIS Code FACW CoC 5

DESCRIPTION

Tree (to 30 m tall), often with multiple trunks, an irregular crown and arching branches. The bark is reddish to cinnamon brown, and peeling in tough strips giving a ragged appearance. Unlike other birch species, the broken twigs have no fragrance. Leaves (4 to 12 cm long) are simple, alternate, diamond or triangular-shaped with irregular double-toothed margins. Upper leaf surfaces are dark green, lower surfaces are pale, and leaf stalks (petioles) are hairy.

FLOWERS AND FRUITS

April; May to June. Male and female reddish-green flowers appear in the spring and are clustered in cone-like spikes (catkins). Male catkins are slightly drooping and cylindrical, and female catkins are stout, erect and oblong-oval. Fruits are winged seeds (samaras) protected by “bird-foot” like scales of the persistent fruiting cone, until ripe when the cone disintegrates releasing the seeds.

HABITAT

Floodplain forests, sand bars and rocky stream bars, stream banks, and swamps.

SIMILAR SPECIES

See the page for *Betula alleghaniensis* for differences between these species.



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Flowers

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