



River Birch (*Betula nigra* L.)

Also called “Red Birch”

Location: The river birch is found throughout North Carolina except in the highest mountains of North Carolina. The river birch is the only native birch found at low elevations in the South. It is commonly found along waterways, on banks of streams, near ponds and near swamps, inhabiting deep, rich soils throughout the state.

Shape: The crown is irregular and picturesque and is divided where the arching limbs spread from the main trunk.

Bark: The bark varies from reddish brown to cinnamon-red in color and peels back in tough papery layers. The papery layers are usually covered with a gray powder. On older trees, the bark on the main trunk becomes thick, deeply furrowed and reddish-brown.

Leaves: The leaves are roughly oval, pointed, 1 1/2 to 3 inches long, with double-toothed margins.

Fruit: The fruit is cylindrical, 1 to 1 1/2 inches long and 1/2 inch thick. It grows erect and produces mature fruit in the spring.

Wood Type: Hardwood. The wood is quite hard and has a close-grain. If the river birch arches out over a stream, the wood is unacceptable for use in furniture and other products requiring a smooth finish.

Mature Height: 70 to 80 feet high

Mature Diameter: 1 to 3 feet

Uses: Furniture and other products, where its close-grained properties make it valuable.

Reference: Holmes, J. S., & Holmes, J. S. (2015). *Common forest trees of North Carolina: A pocket manual*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Forest Service.