

## Paper Birch



### COOL FACTS:

<b>Scientific name:</b>	Betula papyrifera
<b>Average height:</b>	Up to 30 meters (98 feet) tall
<b>Type:</b>	Deciduous
<b>Did you know?</b>	It is the provincial tree of Saskatchewan.

### PHYSIOLOGY

Paper Birch trees usually have a single trunk up to 60 cm in diameter and grow to an average height of 30 meters. The bark and branches of young trees are a dark reddish-brown, but mature trees have whitish bark with small black marks and scars, readily peeling from the trunk in thin, paper-like sheets. The leaves are triangular or egg-shaped and are about 3 inches long with double serrations on the edges. The leaves are a dull green colour on top and are paler underneath. Individual flowers are arranged in long clusters known as catkins. They hang from the branches during the summer. Male catkins are up to 100 mm long; females are 50mm long. They shed copious amounts of pollen in April or May before the leaves emerge. Paper Birch are fast growing trees, but are generally short-lived, with an average life span of 80 years.

### HABITAT

Full sun and partial shade are best for this tree. The Paper Birch grows well in acidic, loamy, moist, sandy, well-drained and clay soils. While it prefers normal moisture, the tree has some drought tolerance. They are often found on the edges of lakes and forests and are often the first trees to grow in an area that has been burned or logged.

Wintering moose use the Paper Birch as a diet staple, although it has poor nutritional quality. White-tailed deer eat considerable amounts of Paper Birch leaves in the fall. Snowshoe hares, beavers and porcupines also feed on Paper Birch. A variety of wildlife species eat the seeds and nest in the branches including: voles, shrews, redpolls, siskins, chickadees, woodpeckers, nuthatches and swallows. The yellow-bellied sapsucker finds the Paper Birch a favorite tree to peck. Hummingbirds and red squirrels feed at sap wells created by the sapsuckers.

Paper Birch is used to make furniture, flooring, and Popsicle sticks.

You can also make birch syrup (which is similar to maple syrup) out of the sap. However, the sugar content in birch sap is not as high as maple tree sap so you have to boil the sap longer to make syrup.

### PROTECTION/THREATS

As with all birches, the bronze birch borer can be a significant problem. The bronze birch borer is a small boring beetle that lays eggs on the tree. When the eggs hatch, the young larvae burrow into the tree and feed on the phloem, the food-conducting tissue. However, Paper Birch is one of the more resistant species of birch so there is less possibility of an infestation.

A serious threat to Paper Birch planted outside its natural setting is birch dieback. This disease involves the slow death of twigs and branches until the entire tree is killed. It happens when roots become too hot when the soil is not covered by leaf litter. Leaf litter keeps the soil cool and moist, and without this insulating layer the birch roots become too hot and die. As the roots die, the branches receive less water and they begin to die.

### MORE COOL FACTS:

Leaves of birch are used in the preparation of tea in Finland.

The wood of the Paper Birch is excellent for starting a campfire and can burn at high temperatures even when the wood is wet.