

# WHITE BIRCH



## A. Identification

- in all forested regions across Canada, north to the tree line
- **leaves**--oval or triangular in shape and 5 to 10 cm long
  - tip is pointed and double toothed
  - upper surface is dull green, but lighter beneath
- **flowers**---grow in clusters of 1 to 3
  - seed catkins are 1 to 2 cm long and are pink or red
- **fruit**--mature seed catkins are 3 to 5 cm long
  - fruits and scales shed from September onward leaving bare catkins on the tree
- **bark**--thick, smooth, dark red to almost black on young stems, then reddish brown and bright creamy white
  - the bark often sheds in large sheets
  - when the outer bark is removed, the inner bark is reddish orange that turns black and comes off
  - letting large parts of the inner bark can kill the tree
- **wood**---the feel of the wood is the same throughout
  - wood is pale in color and has no smell

## B. Climate / Location:

- it can grow in a boreal forest to areas where it can take a lot of precipitation
- grows as far up north as the Arctic Circle

## C. Habitat:

- tree is found on the forest edges, lakeshores and roadsides
- grows on many kinds of soils in pure stands and mixed areas that have been burned out
- tree is among the first type of trees to reforest areas that have been burned out

### **E. Reproduction:**

- male catkins form in the fall and stay asleep over winter and mature in the spring
- female catkins are born on shoots in the spring
- female catkins develop seeds and ripen in early summer
- winged seeds are spread by wind after ripening and can lie asleep up to two years until there is enough sun and rain so that the seeds can grow
- they can also grow from sprouts following a forest that has a lot of trees cut or from a wildfire

### **F. Uses:**

- **traditional**
  - Aboriginal Native Americans used birch bark to make canoes, rattles, torches, containers, and dwellings
  - lightweight and flexible bark could be cut so that trays, dishes, storage boxes, buckets, and pots were made from it
  - birch bark cutouts /stencils were used to decorate containers so that they could be used with fire or to carry water
  - because it burned easily it was shredded and used for tinder to start campfires
- **modern**
  - is most commonly used for firewood and furniture framing

### **G. Fun and Important facts:**

- birch juice taken from standing trees is a common drink in rural Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia
- birch leaves make a special tea, dyes and cosmetics
- trees can be tapped for birch syrup
- if you are going to be allergic to tree pollen, hay fever sufferers will probably be suffering from the birch pollen
- chaga mushroom grows on white birch trees, and can be used to treat cancer
- white birch, which is often called paper birch, is Saskatchewan's tree emblem

### **Bibliography:**

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