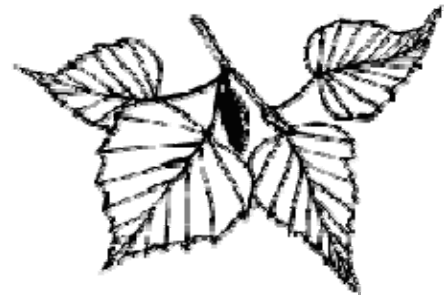


# Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

**Common Name:** Gray Birch

**Botanical name:** *Betula populifolia*

**Tree Type:** Deciduous



## **Physical Description:**

**Growth Habit:** Gray birch is a small growing and short-lived tree. It is most characteristic and aggressive in New England, typically found with pitch pine and scrub oak. The outer bark of the gray birch is chalky white and non-peeling. The inner bark is orange. The trunk has numerous dark, v-shaped markings at the base of the branches as well as dark narrow marks lower on the trunk, which is characteristic of all birches. Twigs are reddish brown, slender and covered with numerous warty glands. The terminal bud is found on spur shoots. The lateral buds are spindle-shaped, widest near the middle and somewhat sticky. The leaves are simple and alternate measuring 2 ½ - 3 inches long and 1 ½ - 2 ½ inches wide. They are triangular, narrowly pointed, serrate, smooth, and somewhat sticky when young.

**Height:** Gray birch can attain a height of 20-30 feet with a trunk diameter of 6-12 inches.

**Shape:** The branches start high in the tree and are short, slender and sometimes droopy.

## **Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:**

The fruit is a slender, erect, cone-like structure, ¾ inch long and 1/3 inch thick, on a short stalk; consisting of winged nutlets and 3-lobed scales in alternate layers; both become detached from the central stem in late fall and winter. The seeds are minute with broad wings and spread by the wind. The flowers are produced in catkins. Those which appear in the fall are all of male sex and usually solitary.

## **Range within Maine:**

Gray birch occurs statewide, but is only abundant in the southern and eastern parts of the state. It prefers full sun and is prolific in poor, well-drained soil.

## **Distinguishing Features:**

Gray birch has long-pointed triangular leaves and dull, chalky-white bark which does not peel in layers. A common feature is the occurrence of several trees in a cluster, all growing from the same root group

## **Interesting Facts:**

The wood is light, soft, and often coarse-grained and decays rapidly when exposed. It is mainly used for fuel or pulpwood.

## **Relationship to Wildlife:**

The seeds and buds are eaten by ruffed grouse and deer browse on its twigs.

## **Landscape Use:**

Gray birch's small size and slender trunk make it useful where limited size is needed. The narrow shape and white trunks make an interesting avenue of white columns when planted together. It is best in natural plantings.

## **Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:**

Pests of the gray birch include leaf miner and cankers.

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