

Friends of the Arboretum Native Plant Sale



Betula nigra

COMMON NAME: River Birch, Red Birch

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Betula nigra* (nigra is Latin for black)

FLOWER: Male catkins are yellow and up to 3 inches long. The female flowers are inconspicuous.

BLOOMING PERIOD: Early April

SIZE: Medium-sized tree growing to a height of 40-50 feet or more. The branches spread 40 to 60 feet. Often sold with 3 or more trunks.

BEHAVIOR: Medium to rapid growth rate. Tends to resist insect attacks better than paper birches.

SITE REQUIREMENTS: Native to floodplain soils with a high water table. Grows on pure sand along the Wisconsin River, but water is not far below. Not tolerant of shade. Adapts well to home landscapes, but will not tolerate alkaline soils (develops iron chlorosis – yellowed leaves).

NATURAL RANGE: Southwestern Wisconsin to southern New England. South to Florida and eastern Texas.

SPECIAL FEATURES: Long yellow catkins are attractive in early spring, but the outstanding feature of this plant is its heavily peeling, papery bark with shades of reddish and pink year-round on young and middle-aged trees. Older trees have dark bark. Fall color is yellow, but not very showy. The shape and bark add interest to a winter landscape.

SUGGESTED CARE: Water well during the first few years of establishment and avoid planting near concrete foundations or in highly disturbed, alkaline soils.