



Cooperative Extension Publications

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Native Trees and Shrubs for Maine Landscapes

Sweet Birch

(Betula lenta)

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Go native!

This series of publications is the result of a five-year research project that evaluated the adaptability of a variety of native trees and shrubs to the stresses of urban and residential landscapes in Maine. Non-native invasive plants pose a serious threat to Maine's biodiversity. Plants such as Japanese barberry, shrubby honeysuckle, and Asiatic bittersweet, originally introduced for their ornamental features, have escaped from our landscapes, colonizing natural areas and displacing native plants and animals. By landscaping with native plants, we can create vegetation corridors that link fragmented wild areas, providing food and shelter for the native wildlife that is an integral part of our ecosystem. Your landscape choices can have an impact on the environment that goes far beyond your property lines.

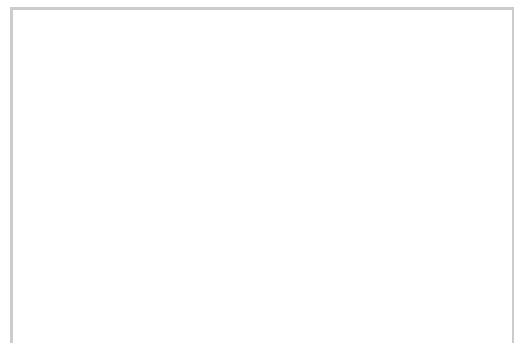
Description

Form: a rounded tree with a well-defined main trunk bearing stout, ascending limbs and slightly pendulous branchlets

Size: 50 to 75 feet high, typically two-thirds as wide

Ornamental characteristics:

- clear lemon to golden yellow fall foliage



- rich dark reddish bark

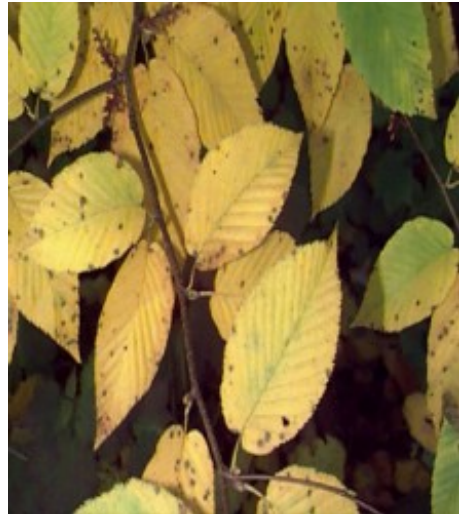
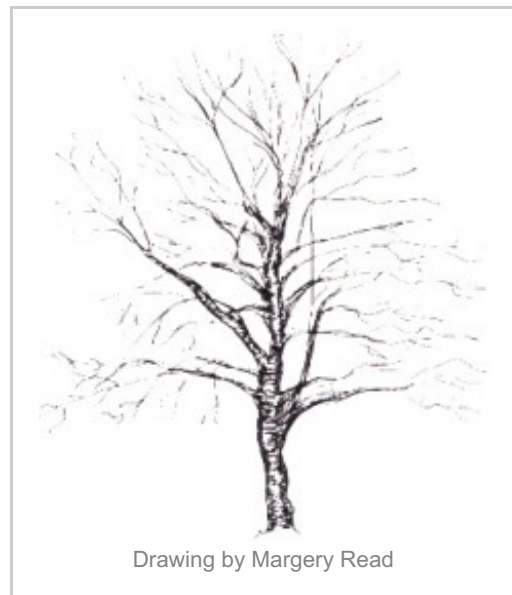


Photo from University of Connecticut Plant Database

Landscape Use

In the wild, sweet birch flourishes in upland sites with moist but well-drained soils, typically found on the cool north and east slopes, growing with white pine (*Pinus strobus*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), Canada hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), and pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*). It is highly intolerant of poorly drained sites, as well as soil compaction. Among our native birches, *B. lenta* is most tolerant of alkaline soils.

Well worth growing for its deep yellow fall foliage, sweet birch is ultimately a large tree and should be used only where space will allow development of its spreading crown, which is often as much as 50 feet wide. It is well suited for use in public parks and on college campuses.



Drawing by Margery Read

Culture

Hardiness: USDA zone 3b

Soil requirements: tolerant of a wide variety of soils

Light requirements: full sun or partial shade

Stress tolerances:

soil compaction—intolerant

pollution—intolerant

deicing salts—intolerant

urban heat islands—intolerant

drought—intolerant

seasonal flooding—intolerant

Insect and disease problems: bronze birch borer

Wildlife Value

Seeds of sweet birch are a favorite food of many songbirds and upland ground birds.

Maintenance

Irrigation: During the establishment period, defined as one year after planting for each inch of trunk diameter at planting time, water your trees regularly during the growing season. Give the root zone of each tree 1 inch of water per week; in general, a tree's root zone extends twice as wide as its canopy. After the establishment period, provide supplemental irrigation during periods of severe drought.

Fertilization: Landscape trees and shrubs should not be fertilized unless a soil test indicates a need. Correct soil pH, if necessary, by amending the backfill soil. No nitrogen fertilizer should be added at planting or during the first growing season.

To learn more about native woody plants

Visit the Eastern Maine Native Plant Arboretum at University of Maine Cooperative Extension's Penobscot County office, 307 Maine Avenue in Bangor. Established in 2004, the arboretum displays 24 different native tree and shrub species that can be used in managed landscapes.

Reviewed by Cathy Neal, Extension professor, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

Photos by Reeser C. Manley.

Illustration by Margery Read, Extension master gardener.

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