




# Betula lenta

## Sweet or Black or Cherry Birch

Tried and True  
Native Plant Selections  
for the Mid-Atlantic

Sweet Birch shows off in fall with its golden-yellow color—among the best of the birches—and in winter with the sheen of its young bark. Its fragrant foliage and twigs were historically a source of wintergreen flavoring. It finds a home\* on the cool north and east slopes of mountain woods.



Tree	Trees (Bare and Leafing Out), Bark, Leaves	
Height: 40–75 feet		
Spread: 35–50 feet		
Bloom Color: Yellow green		
<b>Characteristics</b>		
Medium-sized <a href="#">deciduous</a> tree with rounded crown of spreading branches		
<a href="#">Alternate</a> , <a href="#">ovate</a> , sharply-serrated, green leaves		
Male flowers: 2–3 inch long <a href="#">catkins</a> , in groups of 4		
Female flowers: ½–1 inch upright catkins; fruit: cone-like cluster of <a href="#">samaras</a> with two lateral wings		
Excellent fall color of golden yellow		
Young reddish-brown <a href="#">bark</a> with distinct horizontal <a href="#">lenticels</a> ages from gray to black with scaly plates		
<b>Attributes</b>		
Tolerates dry sites (but prefers moist ones), rocky <a href="#">soils</a> , heavy soils; intolerant of shade; may be stressed by excessive heat and humidity; resistant to bronze birch borer; susceptible to nectria canker; <a href="#">deer</a> rarely damage		
Like sugar maples, trees can be tapped for the sap, which is fermented into birch beer		
Attracts a variety of songbirds and small mammals; <a href="#">larval</a> host for ~321 <a href="#">lepidopterans</a> , incl. Mourning Cloak, Red-spotted Purple, various Sphinx moths		
<b>High wildlife value</b>	<b>Excellent Replacement for</b>	
<a href="#">Soil Requirements</a> : Rich, acidic soil	<i>Betula pendula</i> - European White Birch	
<a href="#">Light Requirements</a> : Sun, Partial Shade		
<a href="#">Water Requirements</a> : Dry, Moist		
Prune in summer after sap stops flowing		
Use as a shade tree for large sites	*It is not reported in DC. It is common in DE. It is scattered in MD and present throughout PA. In VA, it is common in the mountains, infrequent in the Piedmont, and rare in the Coastal Plain. It is <a href="#">native</a> to NoVA.	
<a href="#">Hardiness</a> : USDA Zones 3a-8b		

developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria

Images by Mary Free, Connecticut College Arboretum and by Robert M. Kline and Elaine Mills (leaves), Longwood Gardens



Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [ext.vt.edu/accessibility](http://ext.vt.edu/accessibility).