



## European White Birch (*Betula pendula*)

Alex X. Niemiera, Professor, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech

### Summary

**Foliage:** Deciduous broadleaf

**Height:** 40 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 25 to 35 feet

**Shape:** Upright

European white birch is a small/medium fast-growing tree with showy white bark and pendulous branch tips (especially when bearing seed). Small, glossy-green summer foliage turns yellow in fall exposing ornamental white bark. This species is considered to be short lived due its susceptibility to pests.

### Plant Needs

**Zone:** 3 to 6

**Light:** Partial shade to full sun

**Moisture:** Moist

**Soil Type:** Sandy, loam, or clay

**pH Range:** 3.7 to 6.5

### Functions

Suggested uses for this plant include shade and specimen plant.

### Planting Notes

Transplants readily.

Plant in spring.

More pH tolerant than River Birch.

Prefers moist, well-drained, sandy or loam soil.

Plant on the north or east side of a house (within shade pattern) so that trees are less apt to be stressed by high temperatures and dry soil. A cool moist site will most likely decrease the susceptibility to pests and thereby increase the life of this and other white barked birches (see Alternatives).

### Car

A regular spray program is necessary to control the bronze birch borer.

Prune in summer or fall. Late winter or early spring pruning causes excessive bleeding of sap.

### Problems

Most white barked birches are susceptible to the bronze birch borer, which can destroy a large tree in one season. They are also susceptible to birch leafminer and Japanese beetles.

## Alternatives

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Cultivars of *Betula pendula*: 'Youngii' is a cultivar with a graceful weeping growth habit. 'Gracilis' is a pendulous form with a finely cut leaf.

*Betula papyrifera* and *B. populifolia* are two northern U.S. natives that also have showy white bark. These species are also prone to pests and are generally considered short lived trees.

## Comments

The European white birch is a very graceful, relatively short-lived tree grown for its ornamental white bark. White barked birches are usually grown in clumps or "groves" and are especially showy when planted in front of a dark background such as a mass planting of pines or other dark leaved evergreens. Extra care such as irrigation during dry periods and pesticide applications, are necessary to have a long-lived tree.

*This material was developed by Carol Ness as part of the Interactive Design and Development Project funded by the Kellogg Foundation.*

