

river birch *Betula nigra*

Kingdom: Plantae

Division/Phylum: Magnoliophyta

Class: Magnoliopsida

Order: Fagales

Family: Betulaceae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The deciduous river, or red, birch tree may grow to a height of 75 feet and a trunk diameter of two feet. Its pink-brown to red-brown bark shreds and curls. The simple leaves are arranged alternately along the stem. The double-toothed leaf may be three inches long on a woolly leafstalk. The tiny male and female flowers are separate but located on the same tree. Male (staminate) flowers are arranged in drooping clusters while female (pistillate) flowers are in short, conelike, hairy clusters. The fruit is a tiny, hairy nut, with a three-lobed wing. Nuts are crowded together in a cone up to one and one-half inches long and one-half inch thick.

BEHAVIORS

The river birch may be found in the southern three-fourths of Illinois and along the Mississippi River. This tree grows along rivers and streams and in bottomland woods. The river birch flowers in April and May. Its wood is used for making furniture. The tree is sometimes planted as an ornamental.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none