PLANT FACT SHEET

Betula papyrifera Marshall

GENUS *Betula* **FAMILY** Betulaceae

COMMON NAMES Paper birch, Canoe Birch, White birch

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Flowers, Leaves, Sap, Bark, Leaves - tea

The very young leaves, shoots and catkins can be eaten in salads or stir-fried dishes.
The sap is used for a drink and can be boiled down to syrup or sugar. It can be used to make birch beer or vinegar.
Birch syrup is used for ice cream, pancakes and in cocoa and coffee drinks.
The young leaves are used for tea.

DESCRIPTION

A tree. It grows 18-25 m high. The trunk can be 40 cm across. It has tough papery bark. It is white and peels off in thin curling layers. (Some forms have orange white bark.) It has a sparse crown. The leaves are oval or triangle shaped. They are 5-10 cm long. The tip is pointed and the base is wedge shaped. Leaves have double teeth. The leaves are dull green above and paler underneath. The flowers are separately male and female. The male or pollen flowers are in catkins 1-3 cm long. These occur in clusters of 1-3. The seed catkins are erect and 1-2 cm long. The fruit are nutlets 1.5-2.5 mm long. These hang in the mature catkins. The brown samaras are edible.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It is very cold hardy. It grows on forest edges and lake shores. It will grow on a variety of soils. It cannot tolerate shade. It suits hardiness zones 2-8. Arboretum Tasmania.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Trees live for 120 years. Sap flow is best on sunny days after a frost.

NOTES

There are about 60 Betula species. They grow in cool north temperate climates. The bark has high levels of betulinic acid and may have anti-cancer properties.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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