



Betula nigra 'Heritage' 'Heritage' River Birch¹

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INTRODUCTION

A North American native, 'Heritage' river birch can grow 50 to 80 feet tall but is often seen at 40 to 50 feet (Fig. 1). It will grow about 30 inches or more each year in USDA hardiness zone 7, faster in the south. It has a narrow, pyramidal to oval crown with many fine branches when young, spreading wider and becoming more oval with age with several branches eventually becoming dominant. It has scaly, beige or creamy white bark, which remains an attractive pinkish-white for a longer period of time than the species. The leaves are generally shaped like a triangle.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Betula nigra* 'Heritage'

Pronunciation: BET-yoo-luh NYE-gruh

Common name(s): 'Heritage' River Birch

Family: *Betulaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 9A (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: hedge; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); near a deck or patio; screen; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

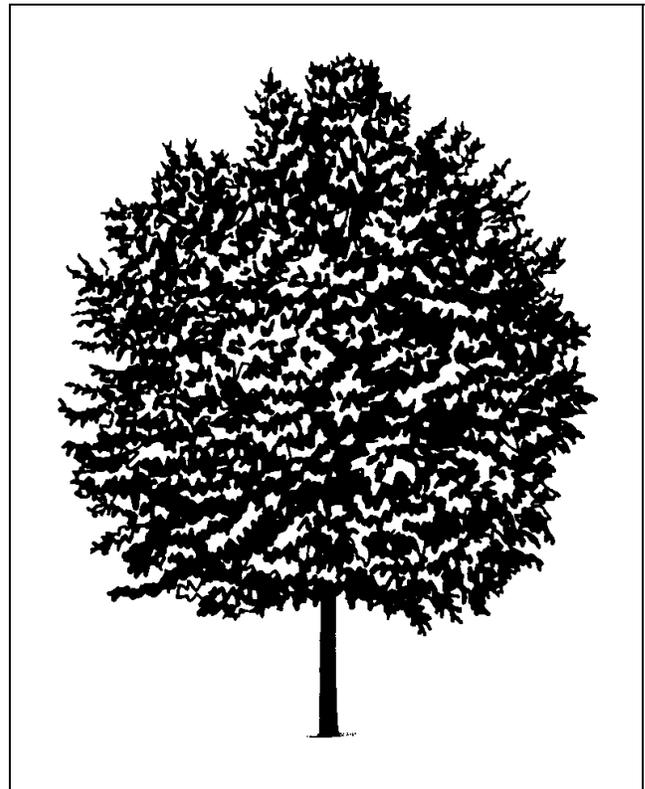


Figure 1. Middle-aged 'Heritage' River Birch.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 50 feet

Spread: 25 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: oval; pyramidal; upright

Crown density: dense

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: double serrate

Leaf shape: ovate; rhomboid

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: brown

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; very showy trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown; reddish

Current year twig thickness: thin

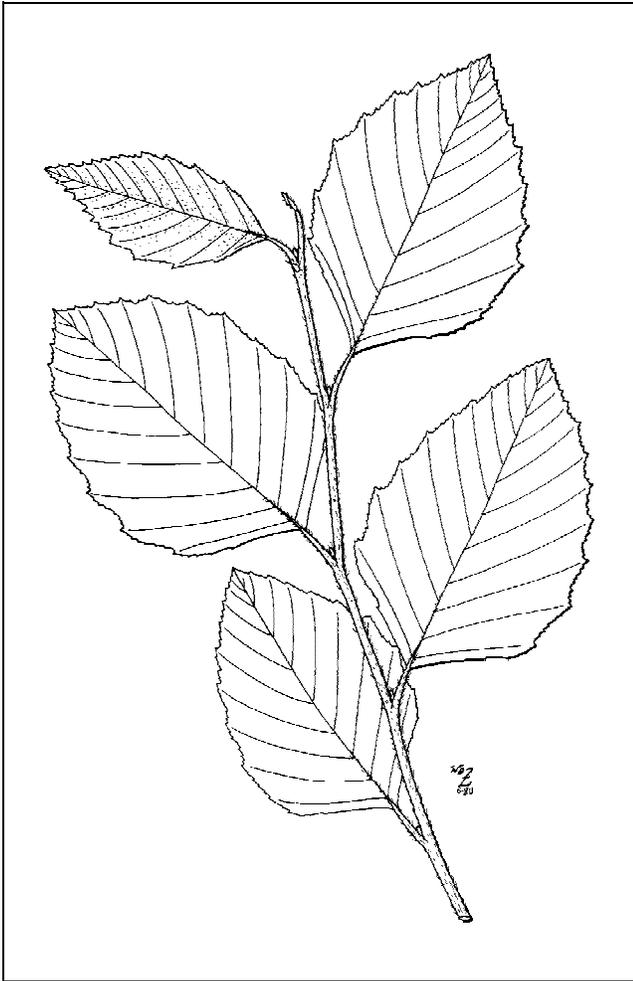


Figure 3. Foliage of 'Heritage' River Birch.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Soil salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

'Heritage' river birch can be trained with one central leader or as a multi-stemmed tree. Like the species, it branches low on the trunk which makes it well-suited for use as a specimen tree, but the trunk must be cleared up for street or other urban uses to allow for pedestrian and vehicular clearance. Some nurseries plant two or three liners together to form a clump but these trunks will not fuse into one strong trunk. In addition, one of the trunks usually outgrows and suppresses the others. It should be grown more as a single-trunked specimen. The branches droop when they are wet, so be careful locating them close to areas where clearance is needed for vehicular traffic.

It is very well-suited for planting along stream banks and in other areas which are inundated with water for weeks at a time. River birch is seen in the wild almost exclusively along stream banks. 'Heritage' river birch tolerates low soil oxygen, periodic flooding, clay, and prefers moist soil. The tree requires an acid soil, otherwise it becomes chlorotic. 'Heritage' river birch is hardy, grows rapidly, but tends to be short-lived (30 to 40 years) in many urban settings including street tree plantings. This might be due to inadequate water supply in dry soil or root rots in continually wet soil. But like the callery pears, it will look great for about two decades or more and this is better than many other trees commonly planted in urban areas. Although the tree tolerates heat well in the south, situate the tree so it receives adequate water since leaves may scorch in dry soil. Not a tree to plant and forget due to irrigation requirement. Not for confined street tree pits or tree lawns in the south unless provided with irrigation. Although it is better adapted to heat than other birches, not a highly heat-tolerant tree.

Propagation of 'Heritage' river birch is by softwood cuttings but the plant is patented.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. 'Heritage' river birch is reportedly resistant to bronze birch borer. Susceptible to leaf miner and scorch, and to leaf spots in wet climates. Aphids and caterpillars infest foliage.