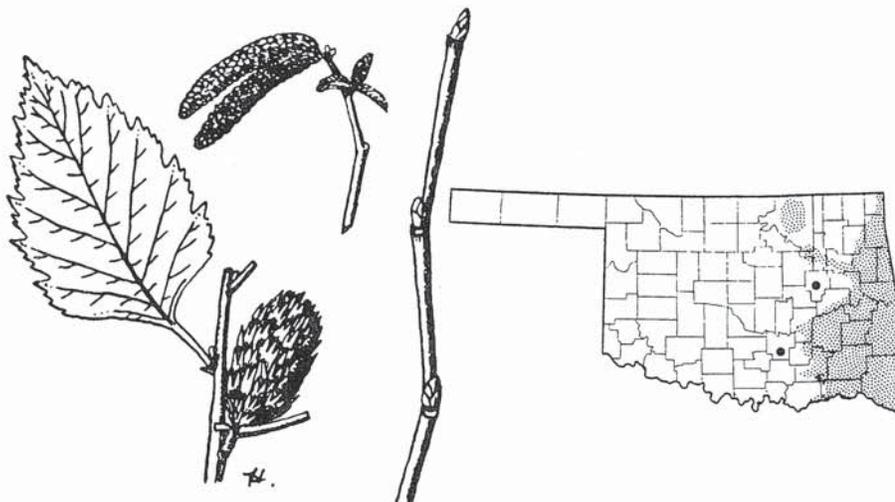


33. RIVER BIRCH

Betula nigra L.; red birch.

Medium-sized to large tree 60 ft (18 m) high with straight trunk 1½ ft (0.5 m) in diameter, often leaning over water, and with irregular spreading crown. Twigs slender, slightly zigzag, red brown, hairy when young. Buds short-pointed, hairy when young, becoming shiny brown, with 2-3 scales; end bud usually shedding.



Leaves mostly in 2 rows, ovate or nearly 4-sided, 1½-3 in (4-7.5 cm) long, 1-2¼ in (2.5-6 cm) wide, short-pointed at both ends, coarsely doubly saw-toothed or slightly lobed, mostly with 7-9 *straight veins* on each side, shiny dark green above, whitish green and usually hairy beneath, turning dull yellow in autumn.

Male flower clusters (catkins) few, drooping, narrowly cylindrical, 2-3 in (5-7.5 cm) long, with many tiny male flowers in early spring before leaves. Female flower clusters (catkins) conelike, elliptical, ¾ in (1 cm) long, greenish.

Fruits short-stalked *upright cones* 1-1½ in (2.5-4 cm) long, cylindrical, with many hairy 2-winged nutlets, maturing in spring or early summer.

Bark shiny *pinkish* brown or *silvery* gray, separating into persistent *papery* scales, becoming thick, fissured, and shaggy.

Wood light to dark or reddish brown with whitish or pale yellow sapwood, diffuse porous, fine-textured, moderately heavy (sp. gr. .55), moderately hard. Of limited supply and not used locally. Elsewhere used for furniture, woodenware, and turnery.

Common and dominant in wet soil, birch-willow forests along stream banks, e. third of Okla. E. third of U.S. except n. border. Zone 4.

The only birch at low altitudes in se. U.S. and the southernmost New World birch. Principal uses are erosion control and as an ornamental for the showy papery bark.