

## Silver Birch (*Betula pendula* )

Warty Birch Irish Beith (family - *Betulaceae*)

**Description:** A smallish fast growing short lived tree. Pioneer and light demanding species. Rapid growth for first 20 years and mature at 40 years. Seldom planted in the UK by foresters although major timber species in Scandinavia, but important for conservation use in woodland. Height max 25m. Max age 60 - 80 years.

**Where found:** This tree tolerates a wide range of habitats, soil ph 3.5 to 7 but best on dry sandy soils and up to higher altitudes than most broadleaved species. Upland birchwoods are an important ecotype in Scotland. Native to all Britain and to west and central Ireland. Also through most of Europe and parts of Asia.

### Phenology:

| <b>Flowers</b> | <b>Leaves</b> | <b>Fruit</b> | <b>Ripen</b> | <b>Fall</b> |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Apr-May        | Apr-May       | June         | Sept         | Nov         |

**Similar species:** A dwarf species *B. Nana* found on mountains in Scotland

**Uses past & present:** White to pale fawn in colour and easily worked. Flexible and tough but not very strong. Trees in Britain commonly rotten in centre reducing usefulness. **Uses of wood** - Good firewood and pulpwood. Treated wood used for fence posts. Used in turnery and formerly for cotton reels and bobbins. Larger timber not usually produced in Britain. Twigs used for making brooms - bessoms. **Food and drink** - Seeds consumed by redpolls, siskins and other small birds. Apparently a wine fermented from the sap was credited with medicinal properties. Wood and bark can be distilled to give birch tar used to make leather waterproof. The bark is waterproof and used in tanning. The young leaves are a diuretic.

**Propagation and growth:** Normally grown from seed although can be grown from cuttings. The seeds are brown flakes with yellow seed are wind dispersed sprouting the following spring in rock crevices or clear damp earth. Approx 150,000 seeds per Kg. Treat seed as per alder. Useful as a nurse species and soil improver.