Silver Birch

Habitat Hero





Common Name: Silver Birch
Irish Name: Beith gheal
Scientific Name: Betula pendula

Seen in Ireland:

Flower: April – May Fruit: Seeds late Summer to Autumn





Silver birch is the faster growing of the two native birch trees, and also the taller, reaching a height of up to 25 m. The leaves are 3-7cm in length. They are triangle shaped leaves, and the bark is Silver- white in colour.



Birch woods occur widely, especially on marginal soils, lake edges and on dried out bogs. It makes a good ornamental garden tree, as it does not grow too large, so you may find it in parks, gardens and on school grounds.



Silver Birch will grow in poor soils, but likes a sunny position, and it needs good drainage. •Photosynthesis is the process in which green plants use sunlight to make their own food.



They usually live 60 - 90 years old, although some individuals can live up to 150 years.

Silver Birch Life Cycle



Seeds will lie in the soil for the Winter. Parent plants lose their leaves in winter

With the warm weather in **Spring** mature trees start to grow leaves and flowers.

Little seeds from last year's trees will also start to grow in the soil as small trees or 'saplings'.



These new seeds dry out and break apart from the tree. They are carried on the wind a small distance from the parent tree.











As **Spring** progresses the leaves grow, and the flowers form a cluster called a 'catkin'.



The catkins, with all of their tiny fertilised flowers then become more like a small tower of seeds by **Autumn**.



Pollen is blown between catkins on different trees. If any tiny flower gets pollen from another one, it is fertilised and turns into a tiny seed.

Silver Birch



Some more Facts:

- The silver birch is a small to medium sized deciduous tree.
- It has fine branches and small leaves, white bark with dark ridges and cracks.
- There are two types of birch in Ireland, Downy and Silver.
- The Silver Birch overall looks more 'weepy' like a Weeping Willow tree, and the leaves are more pointed than heart-shaped, in comparison to the Downy Birch.
- In early times "toghers" or walkways, usually across bog land were made from birch. Nowadays, it is more commonly used in making plywood.
- Birch or belula utilis means useful and in Sanskrit is called bhurja which means tree whose bark is used to write on. Was used as paper from the 4th 16th centuries.
- Ancient celts believed the bark had magical protective qualities and made amulets (necklaces) to keep people safe.
- Birch is a pioneering tree. They help establish woodlands because they are one of the 1st trees to appear, this is why some cultures call them a guardian of the woods, helping to prepare land for the forests to grow.
- In Irish folklore, Birch cribs or tokens were thought to warn off the evil spirits, in particular the "changelings" who would replace a child with a more troublesome one.
- Perhaps a more sinister element to this was the use of the birch rod, to hit or smack bold children





