

# Silver Birch

## Habitat Hero



Green-Schools

An Taisce



Image by Gilles San Martin via Flickr.com

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



Image by Maja Dumat via Flickr.com

### 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.

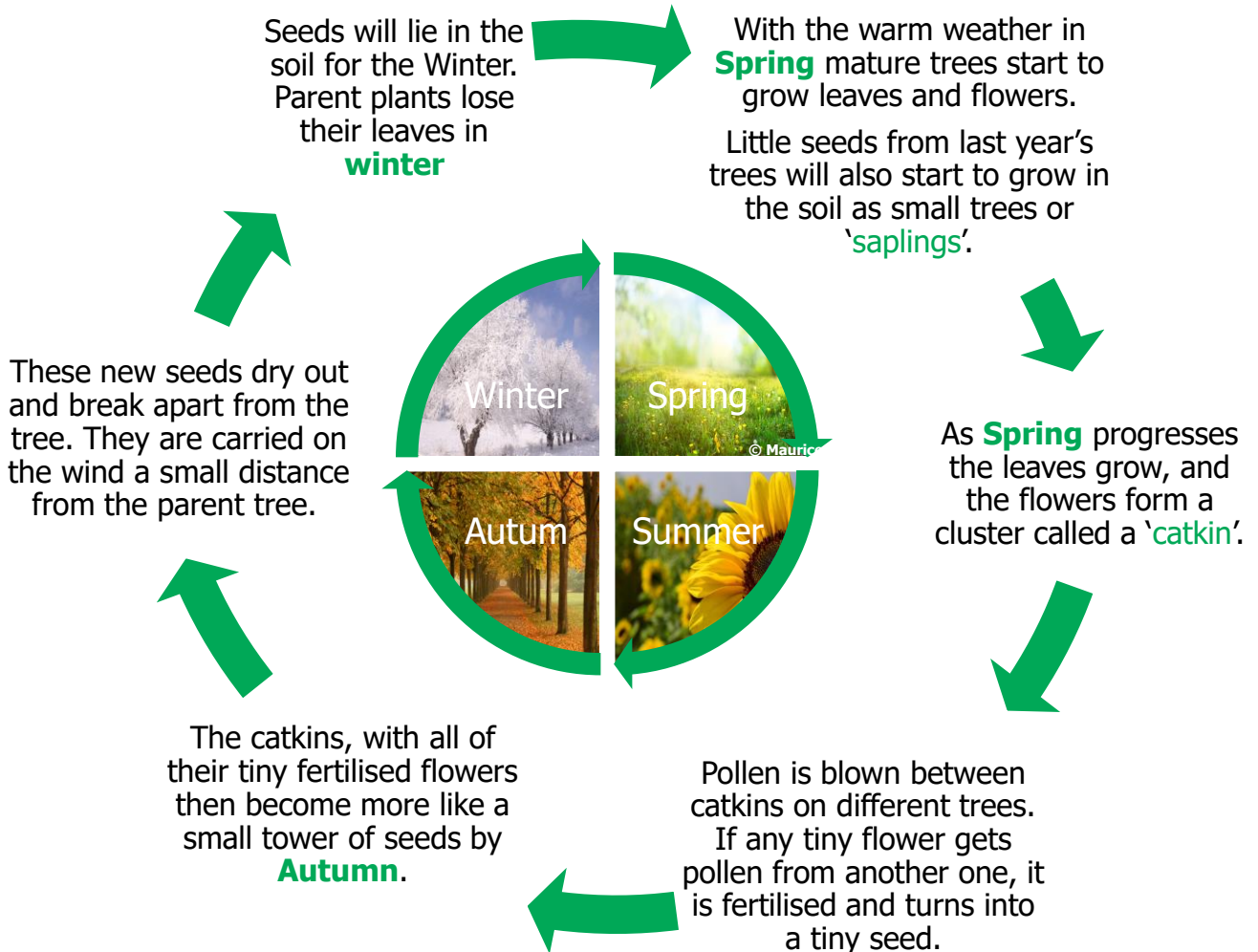


Silver Birch will grow in poor soils, but likes a sunny position, and it needs good drainage. •Photosynthesis is the process in which green plants use sunlight to make their own food.



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

# Silver Birch Life Cycle



# 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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

