

September Tree of the Month

River Birch

The River Birch is a graceful native tree admired for its peeling bark, airy canopy, and tolerance of moist soil.

River Birch typically thrives in moist areas such as along rivers, streams, and wetlands, and is especially good for rain gardens. Although naturally associated with moist habitats, it is an adaptable tree that can also do well in landscapes far from visible water; its name reflects its natural habitat rather than a requirement to grow beside a river. Our highlighted specimen happily grows in a dry location near an old milk house and a long-ago family's well pump, causing one to wonder about the available groundwater during the tree's early years.

This multi-stemmed trunk often has an attractive, exfoliating bark, and the trunk can be brown, cinnamon, salmon, cream or gray, such as ours, with a darker, rougher appearance that comes with age. These are fast growing trees, reaching 70 ft. in height with open, spreading crowns. The triangular to diamond-shaped serrated leaves turn from green to a warm yellow in autumn. These trees can live for 100 years or more. Using diameter growth estimation, ours appears to be either quite old or quite satisfied with its placement by the old barn.

River Birch is an adaptable species and consequently is known as a pioneer species, a hearty specimen that is among the first to grow in disturbed environments.

