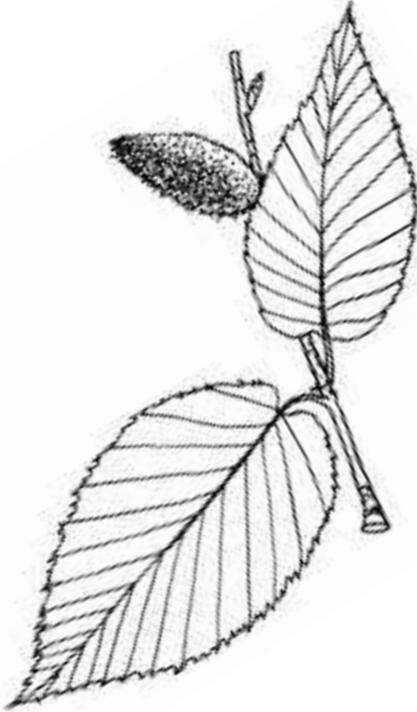




## SWEET BIRCH *Betula lenta* L.



**S**weet, black or cherry birch is found, though uncommonly, in the southern third of the state. It inhabits the banks of streams or moist, rich upland soil. It is a handsome tree with a tall dark stem, and spreading, slender, horizontal branches that are pendulous at the ends. It has a graceful, open, narrow head, which in full sun becomes round and symmetrical. It grows to a height of 60–70 feet and a diameter of 1–2 feet.

The **bark** on the trunk of old trees is dark to almost black, and separates into large, thick, irregular plates. On young trees and branches, it is smooth, shiny, dark brown tinged with red, aromatic, and has a very pronounced wintergreen flavor.

The **leaves** are alternate, 3–5 inches long, aromatic, ovate or somewhat

*The name “cherry birch” is applied to this tree because of the resemblance of the bark on old trunks to that of the black cherry.*





oblong, and sharply toothed. The upper surface is dark green and dull; the lower surface is light yellow-green.

The **flowers** are produced in catkins. The winter shoots support 3 to 4 staminate catkins. They open just before the leaves unfold in the spring.

The **wood** is hard, heavy, strong and can be beautifully polished. It is prized for use in the manufacture of furniture and it makes excellent firewood. Limited amounts are used as pulpwood. Historically, oil with some medicinal value was obtained from the branches and bark by distillation, and was generally known as wintergreen oil.

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*Sweet birch twigs have small spur branches and taste like wintergreen.*

MAINE REGISTER OF BIG TREES 2008  
Sweet Birch Circumference: 139" Height: 82'  
Crown Spread: 48' Location: Gorham

