

INFUSE



birch

part 1 - connection

Gathering
GROUND

INFUSE

Welcome to the first lesson!

I'm so excited to share the magic and medicine of Birch with you over these next few weeks.

In this first week we are going to take it slow.

We are starting with connection.

Listening.

Calling in.

Witnessing.

Honoring.

We begin with a meditation and a simple activity.

Take your time and enjoy it!

Until next time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'LJ' in a cursive, flowing style.



start here

Before we get into the details, before you have any preconceived notions of what they're about, let's call on the spirit of Birch.

In this meditation you will meet Birch and they will share a message with you. Relax and enjoy the ride! (Just click the image below)



journal

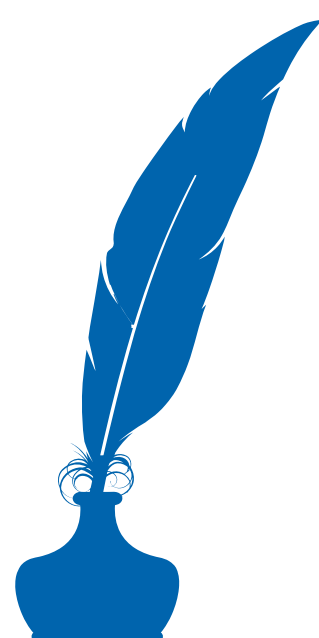
What messages does
Birch have for you?

Record any images, words, or insights that emerged during your journey with Birch.

Allow the messages to unfold over time.

Pay attention to synchronicities. Set an intention before you go to sleep tonight to take your journey with Birch into the Dreamtime.

How else can you bring the wisdom you received into your life?



ritual

Create an altar to honor Birch

Add drawings, quotes, photos, and any objects that remind you of the messages you received in your meditation with the spirit of Birch.



ering
GROUND

INFUSE



birch

part 2 – the illuminated path

Gathering
GROUND

INFUSE

Welcome to part 2!

This week we'll learn how to find Birch in the wild and identify individual species by their bark and leaves, so that you can recognize them in any season.

Look for the clues in the symbolic meanings, the ways they inform how and where to find Birch.

We'll also practice the art of giving, integrating reciprocity into our relationship with the plants.

Next week we'll dive more deeply, explore ethical wildcrafting techniques, and begin to creatively collaborate with Birch.

Until then...

Much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Liz', written in a cursive style.

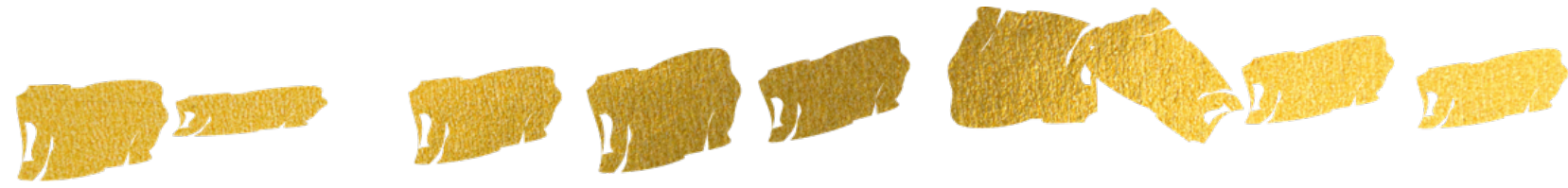


*There is hope,
we can always begin again*



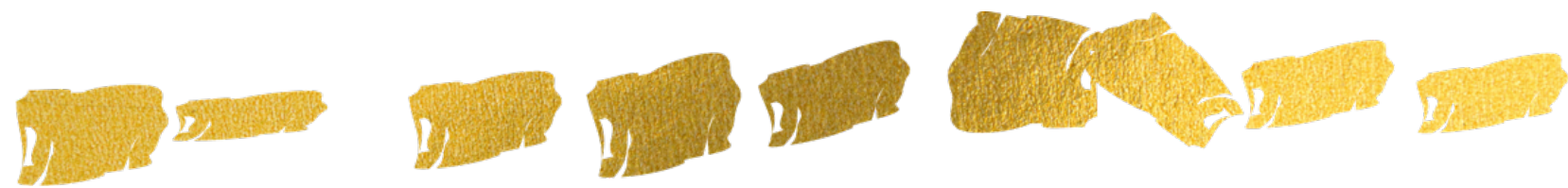


Birch is the tree of new beginnings



They are the first tree to inhabit cleared land, whether by fire, storm, or human hand

When the glaciers receded after the last ice age, Birch trees forged the path for other boreal species.



Birch symbolizes birth, hope, change, fertility, renewal, and the feminine spirit

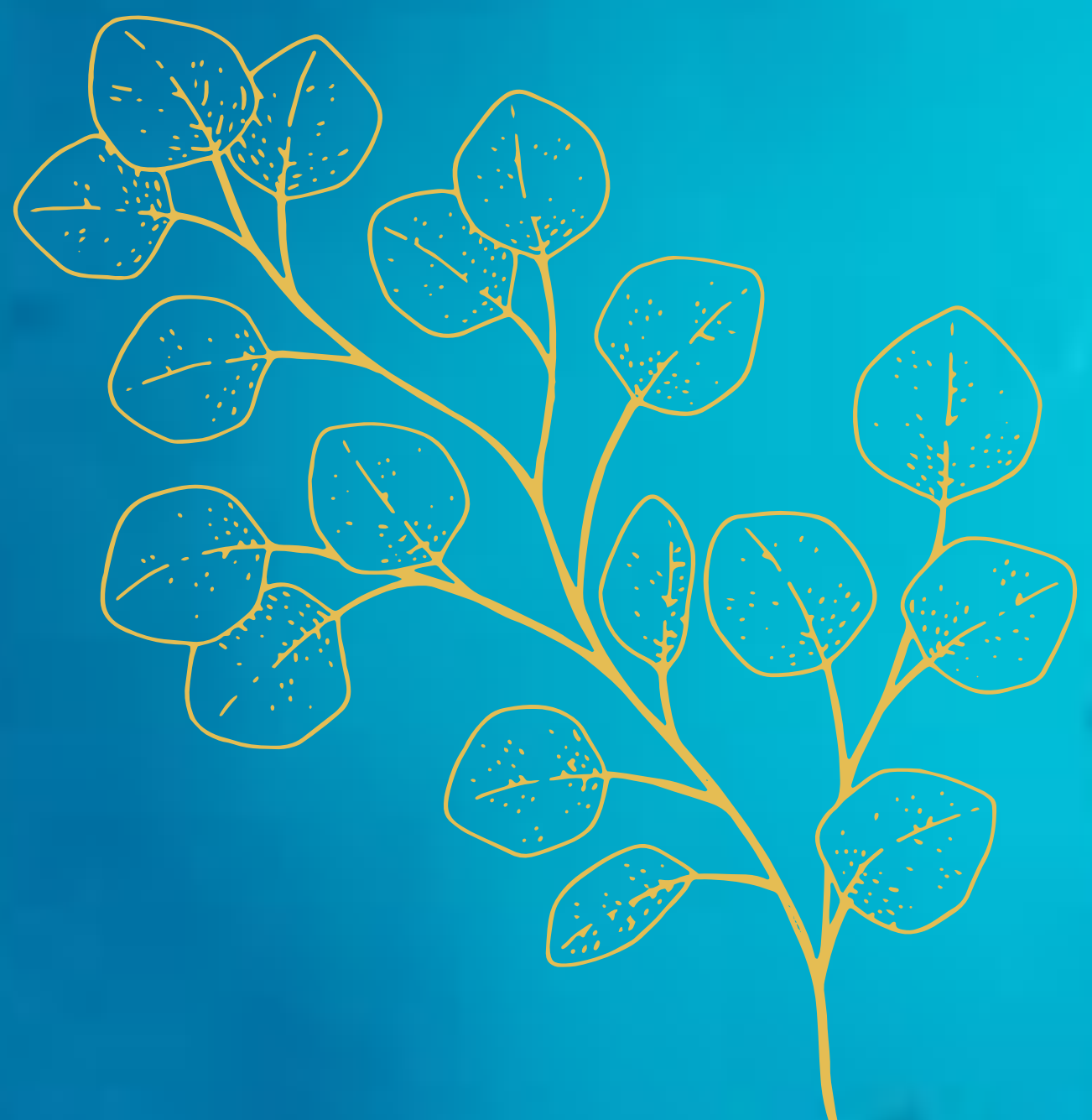


symbolism



Beneath you birch with silver bark
And boughs so pendulous and fair,
The brook falls scattered down the rock:
and all is mossy there.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE



where to find

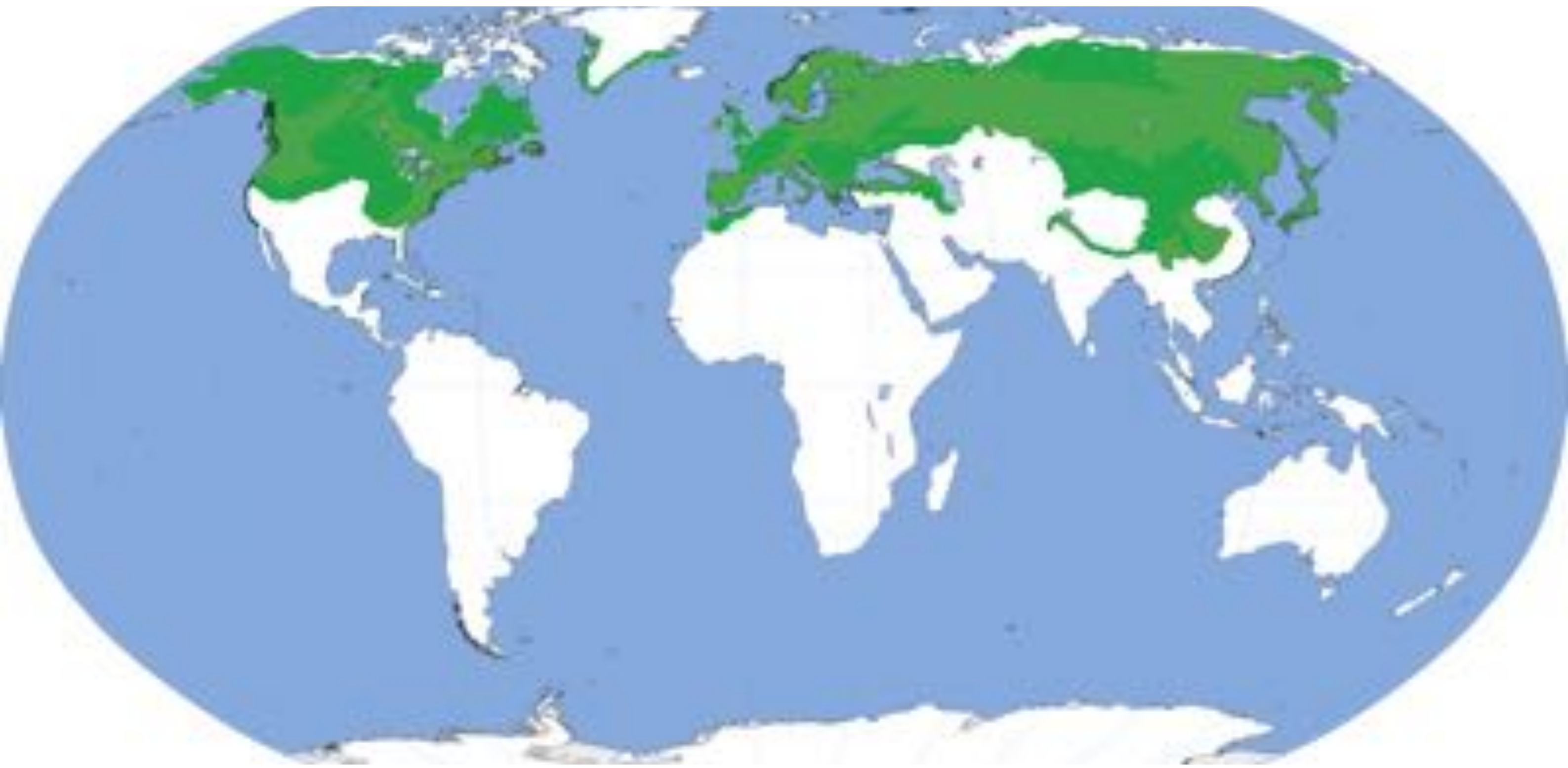
Clearings

Birch trees like sunshine and moonlight.
They find their way to openings, wend their way
to recently cleared places.

Wet places

Birch trees grow at the edges of streams, in
wetlands and meadows, in swamps, and in forests
or forest edges.





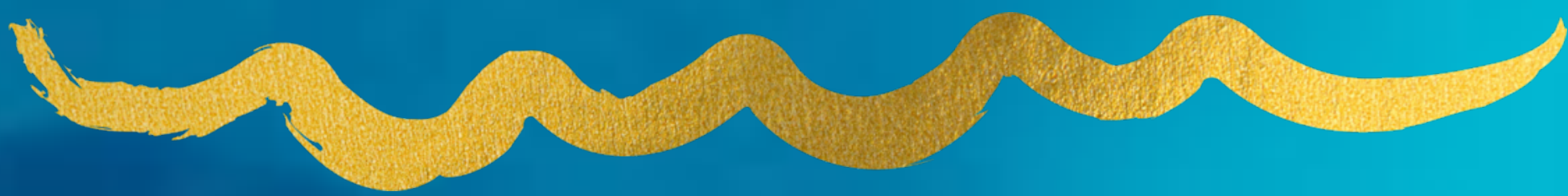
Birch is a boreal species,
circumnavigating what we call the
Northern Hemisphere of the Earth.

where in the world




Abben S on Unsplash

Birch is an important browse for deer and is considered sacred by indigenous people of Turtle Island (North America) and Eurasia who depend on these animals for their livelihood.







Follow the deer trods
through the wood
until sunlight
penetrates the canopy,
there you will find
The Shining One,
The White Goddess,
The Lady of the Woods.



Elen of the Ways is an ancient Earth Spirit from the British Isles. She is the follower of the Reindeer paths, the ancient Dreaming ways, she kens the way and is the way.

Birch is her tree.



From the Wildwood Tarot

Elen of the Ways

meditation

In this meditation, you'll join Elen of the Ways in the Healing Birch Forest.

Set an intention for your journey with her.

Elen is a sovereignty goddess and a protector of the land. Consider this when setting your intention.

Just click the image below to begin.



journal

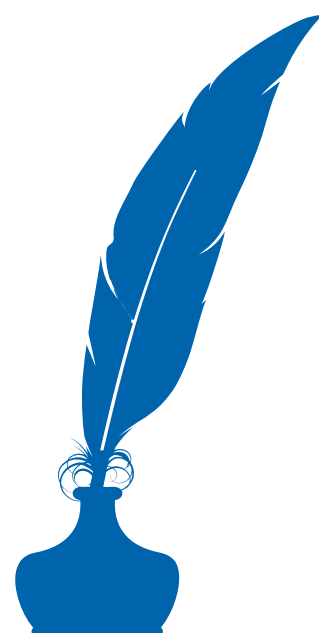
What did Elen of the Ways
show you?

Record any images, words, or insights that
emerged during your journey.

What are the connections between your
intention and the messages Elen shared?

How can you honor Elen, and honor her
sacred Birch trees?

What will you offer?



identification

Birch is a lanky tree, standing out with gently fluttering leaves on thin elegant branches.

The leaves of birch are alternate and simple with finely serrated margins and range from ovate to slightly triangular in shape, depending on the species (see following pages).



Tsyganov Sergey.

Like many other members of the birch (Betulaceae) family, birch is adorned with catkins, with both male and female flowers on the same tree. The male catkins hang down like long pendulums while the female ones are short and stand out straight.

Gathering
GROUND

Let's learn how to identify Birch trees by their bark and leaves.

This way you can recognize Birch any time of the year.



identification

birch species

These six Birch species are found in Northeastern North America and beyond.

Yellow or Swamp Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*)

Cherry, Black, or Sweet Birch (*B. lenta*)

River Birch (*B. nigra*)

Paper Birch (*B. papyrifera*)

European or Silver Birch (*B. pendula*)

Grey Birch (*B. populifolia*)



Betula alleghaniensis

Yellow or Swamp Birch



Nicholas A. Tonelli

Large North American species of Birch in the range of 60-80 feet (18-24 m), upwards of 100 feet (30 m). Also one of the longer lived species of Birch, 150 years on average.

Betula alleghaniensis

Yellow or Swamp Birch Bark ID



mature bark

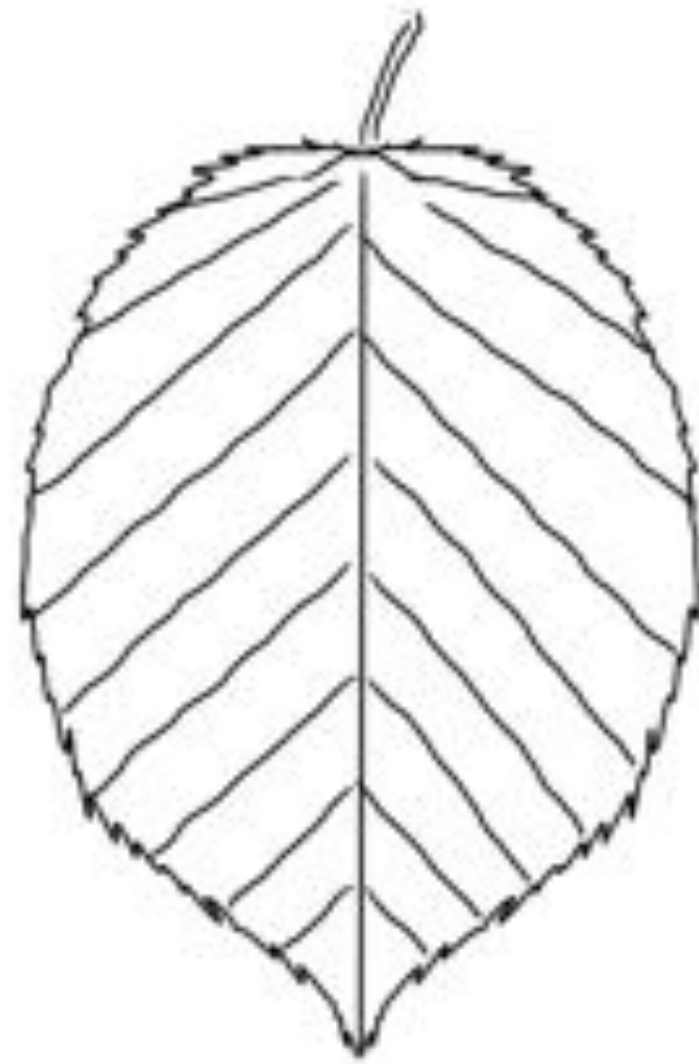


young bark

Bark is peeling, shining, golden when mature. Young bark ranges from deep reddish brown to golden grey. Bark features long horizontal lenticels (those prominent bumpy lines that serve as a means of air transport). Scratch and sniff the bark on a young branch to reveal the spicy scent of wintergreen.

Betula alleghaniensis

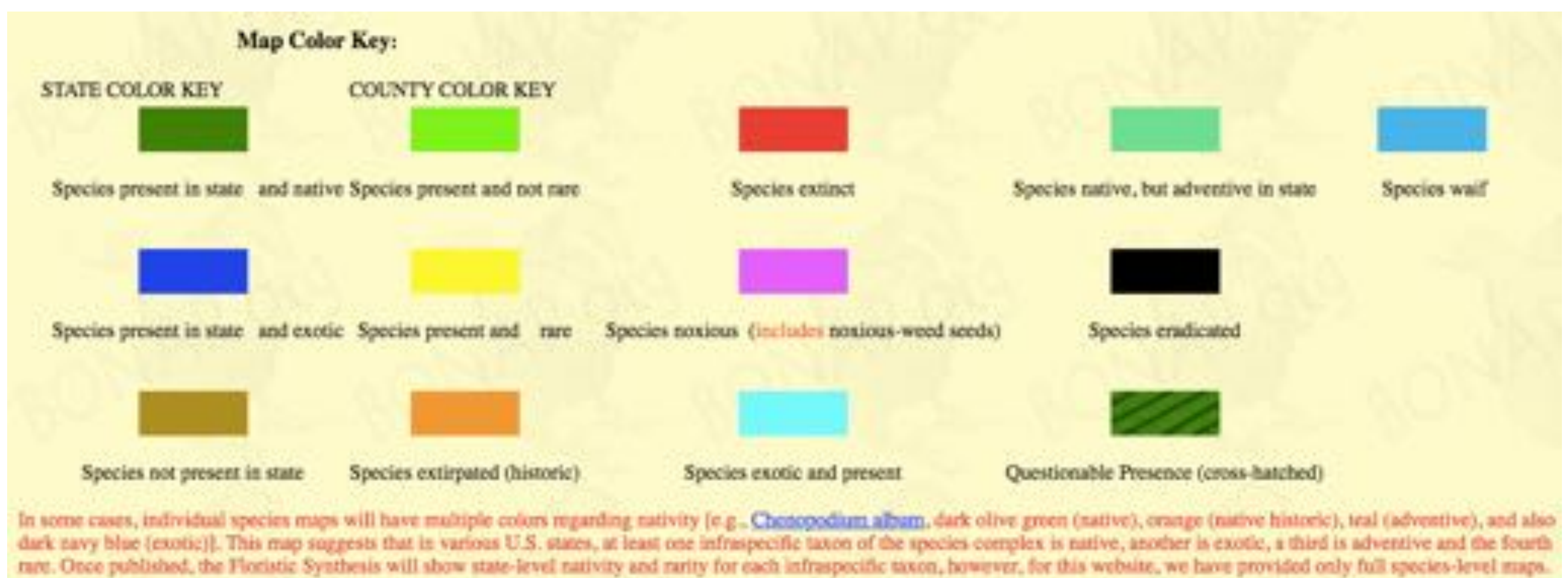
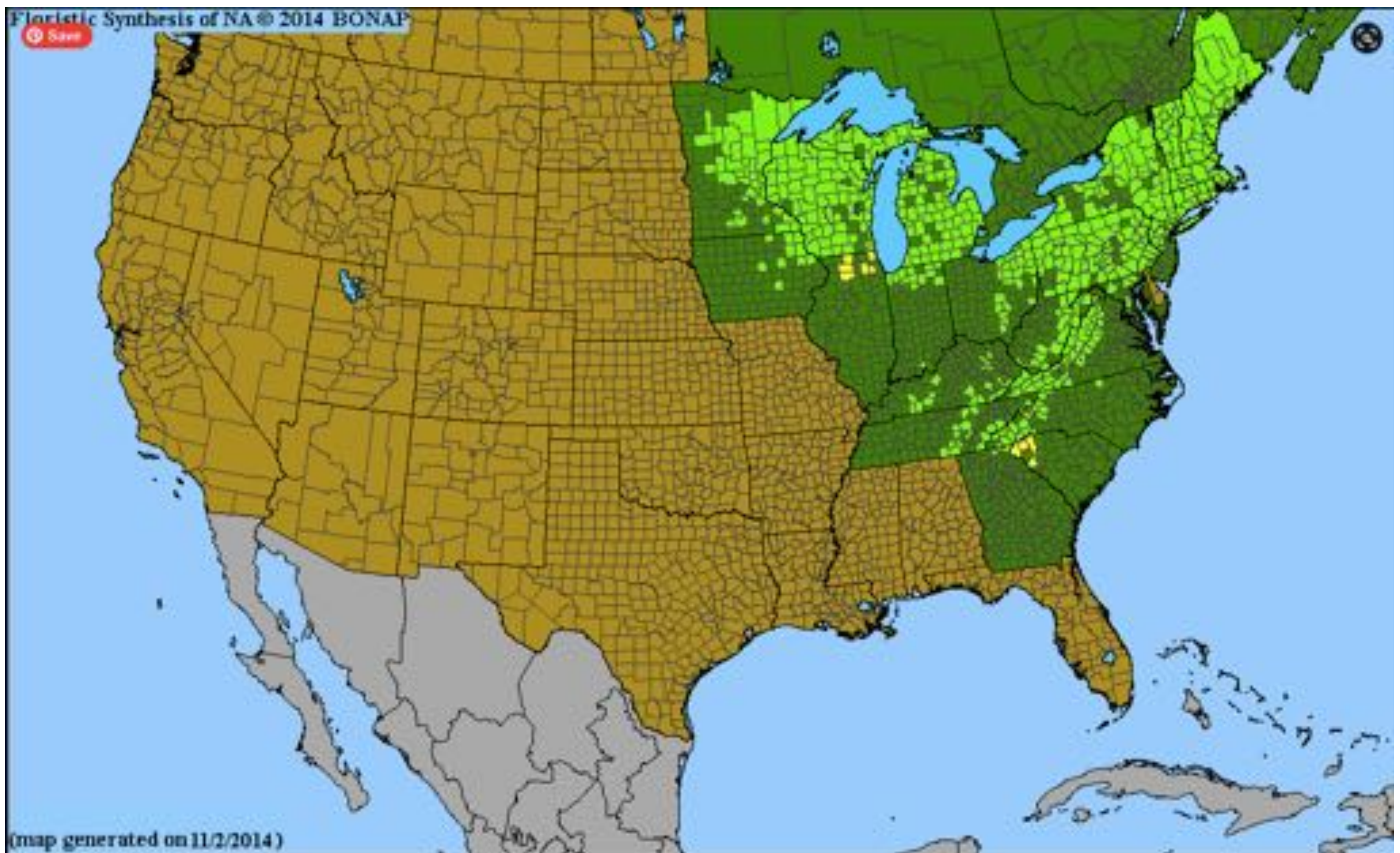
Yellow or Swamp Birch Leaf ID



Leaves are toothed ovate (egg shaped) growing alternately up the stem. They have a pointed tip and often a heart-shaped (cordate) base. Shining dark green on the surface and lighter green beneath.; yellow in fall. Noticeable straight vein pattern from the center line to the toothed edge.

Betula alleghaniensis

Yellow or Swamp Birch Native Range



Data from The Biota of North America Program (BONAP)

Betula alleghaniensis

Yellow or Swamp Birch Uses

This species is native to North America; traditional uses of *B. alleghaniensis* likely go back thousands of years on this continent.

The inner bark is edible, and can be ground into a flour, though this is most likely used as survival food or mixed with other more palatable ingredients.

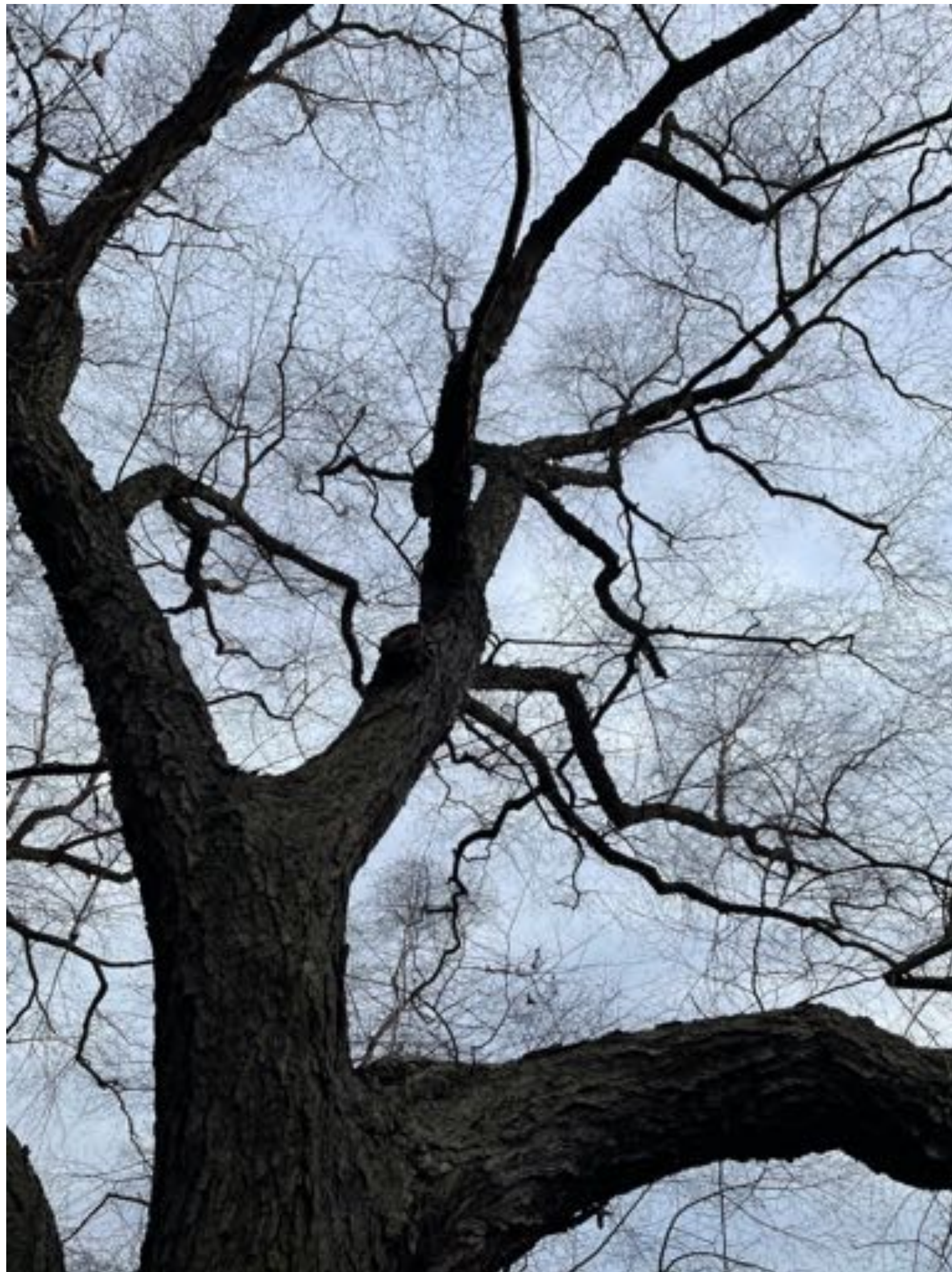
The sap is tapped in early spring – this can be drunk directly, boiled down into syrup, or fermented.

Twigs, leaves, and buds can be made into a decoction (tea). A syrup made from the decoction makes a delicious Birch beer. Recipe and medicinal details forthcoming in a later lesson!



Betula lenta

Cherry, Black, or Sweet Birch in Winter



Large North American species of Birch in the range of 50-80 feet (15-24 m), upwards of 115 feet (35 m). Like Yellow Birch, is a longer lived species – they can live for 200 to 300 years or more.

Betula lenta

Cherry, Black, or Sweet Birch Bark ID



mature bark



young bark

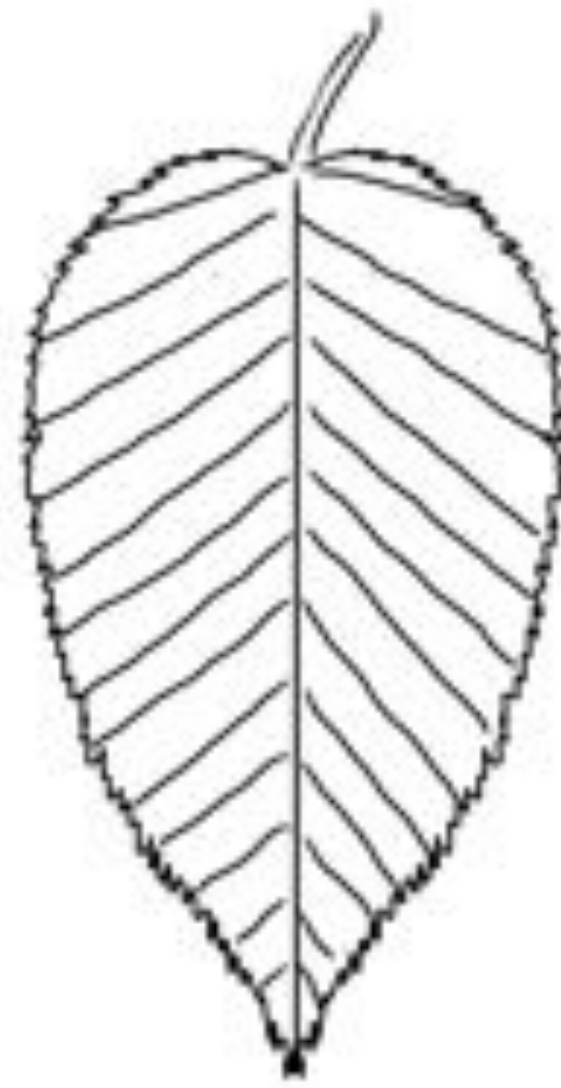
Bark is dark brown-grey to black, platy and peeling away with age. It features prominent horizontal lenticels like a cherry tree – these are more visible on younger trees. Scratch and sniff the bark on a young branch to reveal the spicy scent of wintergreen.

Betula lenta

Cherry, Black, or Sweet Birch Leaf ID



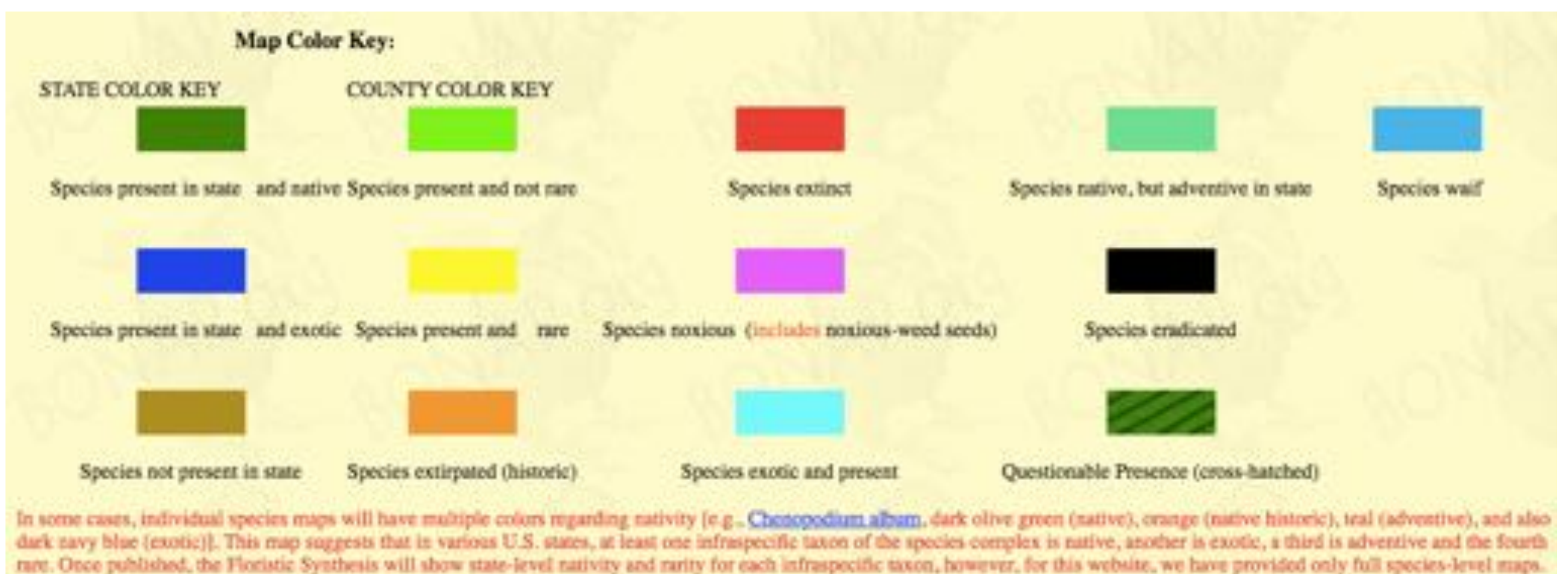
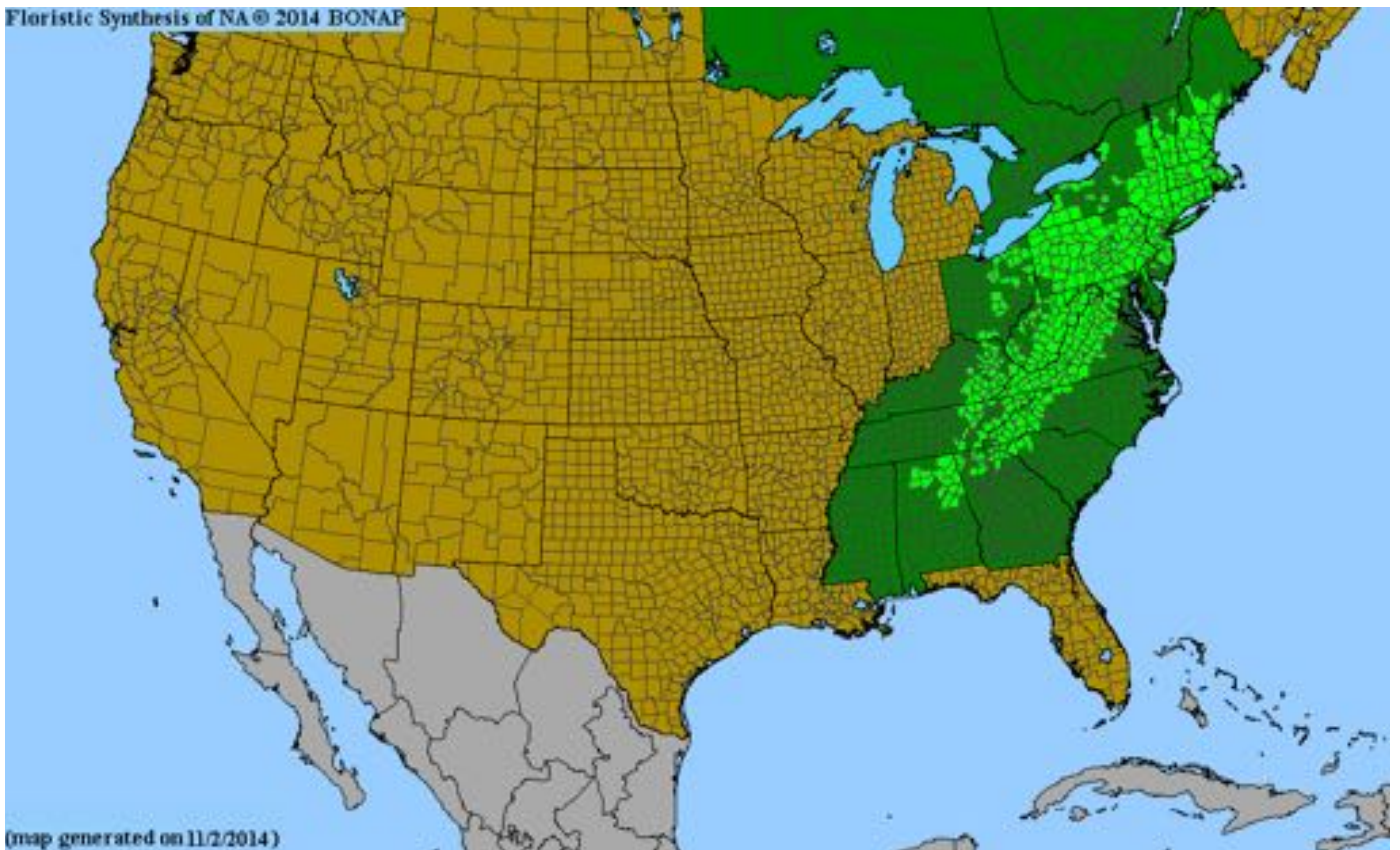
[Rob Routledge, Sault College, Bugwood.org](#)



Leaves are finely toothed ovate and grow alternately up the stem. Compared to *B. alleghaniensis*, the teeth are small. Similarly distinct parallel veins that meet the toothed edge. Bright to dark green yields to golden yellow in fall.

Betula lenta

Cherry, Black, or Sweet Birch Native Range



Data from The Biota of North America Program (BONAP)

Betula lenta

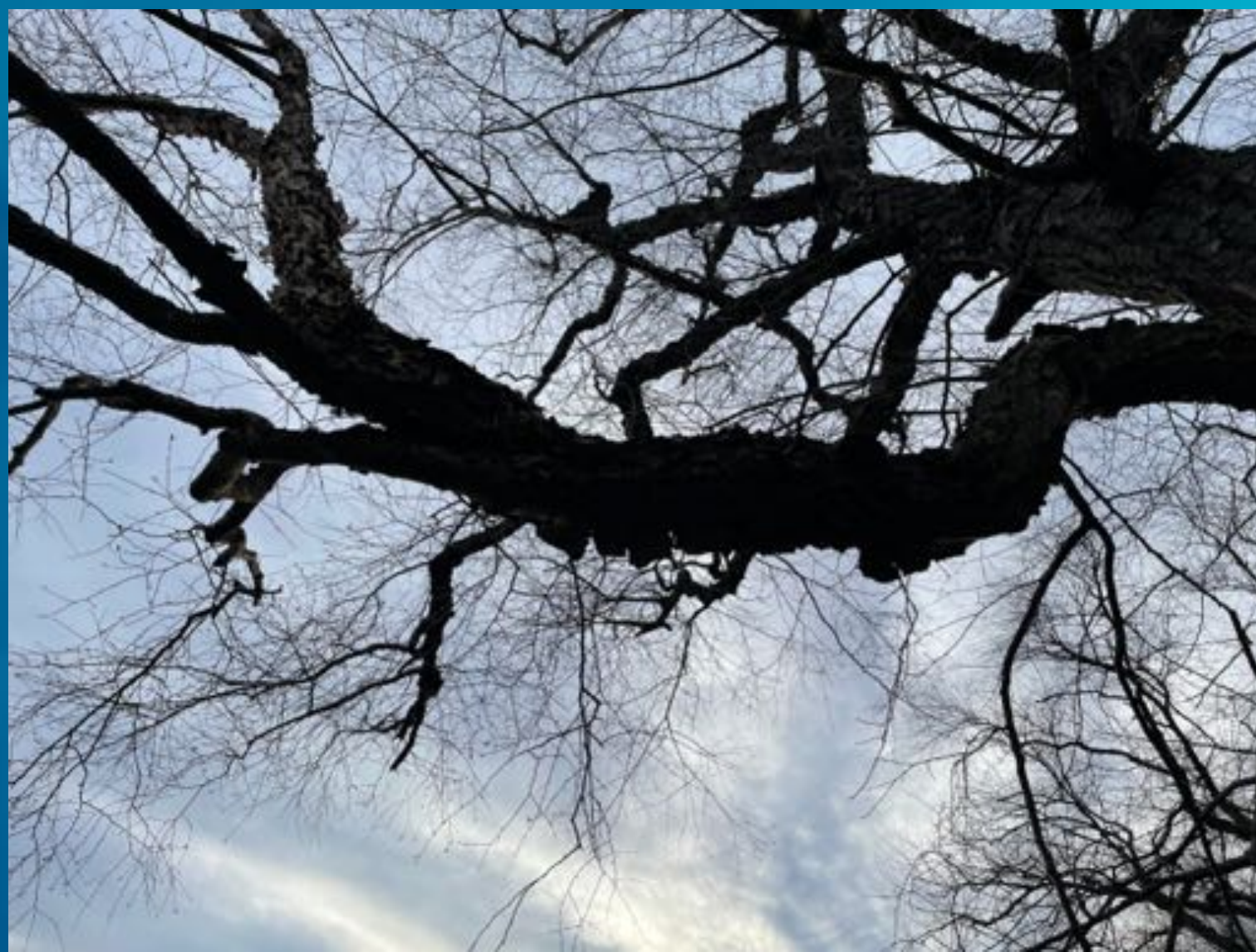
Cherry, Black, or Sweet Birch Uses

This species is native to North America; like *B. alleghaniensis*, traditional uses of *B. lenta* likely go back thousands of years on this continent. There is overlap with the uses of these two species of Birch. They both contain methyl salicylate, which gives them their spicy wintergreen taste and scent.

The inner bark is edible, and can be ground into a flour, though this is most likely used as survival food or mixed with other more palatable ingredients.

The sap is tapped in early spring – this can be drunk directly, boiled down into syrup, or fermented.

Twigs, leaves, and buds can be made into an infusion (tea). A syrup of these makes a delicious (non-alcoholic) Birch beer. Recipe and medicinal details forthcoming in a later lesson!



Betula nigra

River Birch



Large North American species of tree ranging from 40 to 70 feet (12-21 m). Tree is often divided into multiple trunks. A shorter lived species, living up to around 75 years.

Betula nigra

River Birch Bark ID



mature bark



young bark

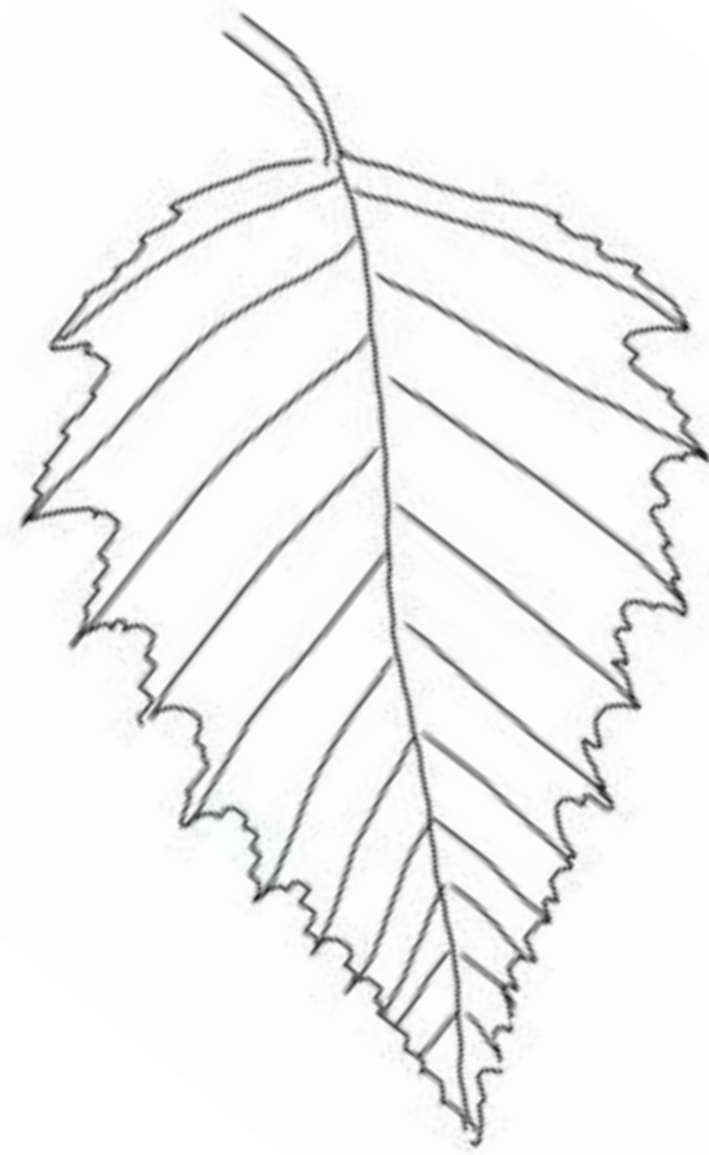
Bark is peeling and ranges from a salmon-pink to reddish brown. Young trees are smoother and more uniform in color than mature trees, with thinly curling papery bark. The papery bark becomes thicker and more platy as the tree ages, culminating in a scaly reddish brown on dark grey.

Betula nigra

River Birch Leaf ID



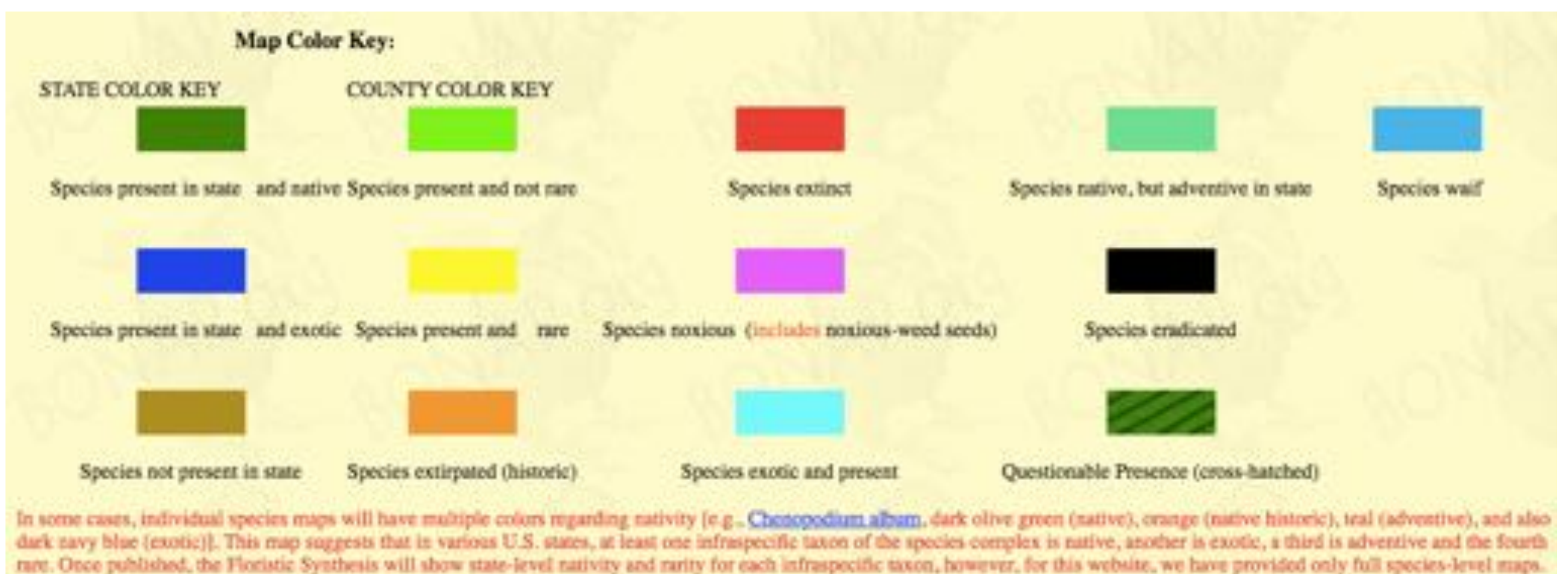
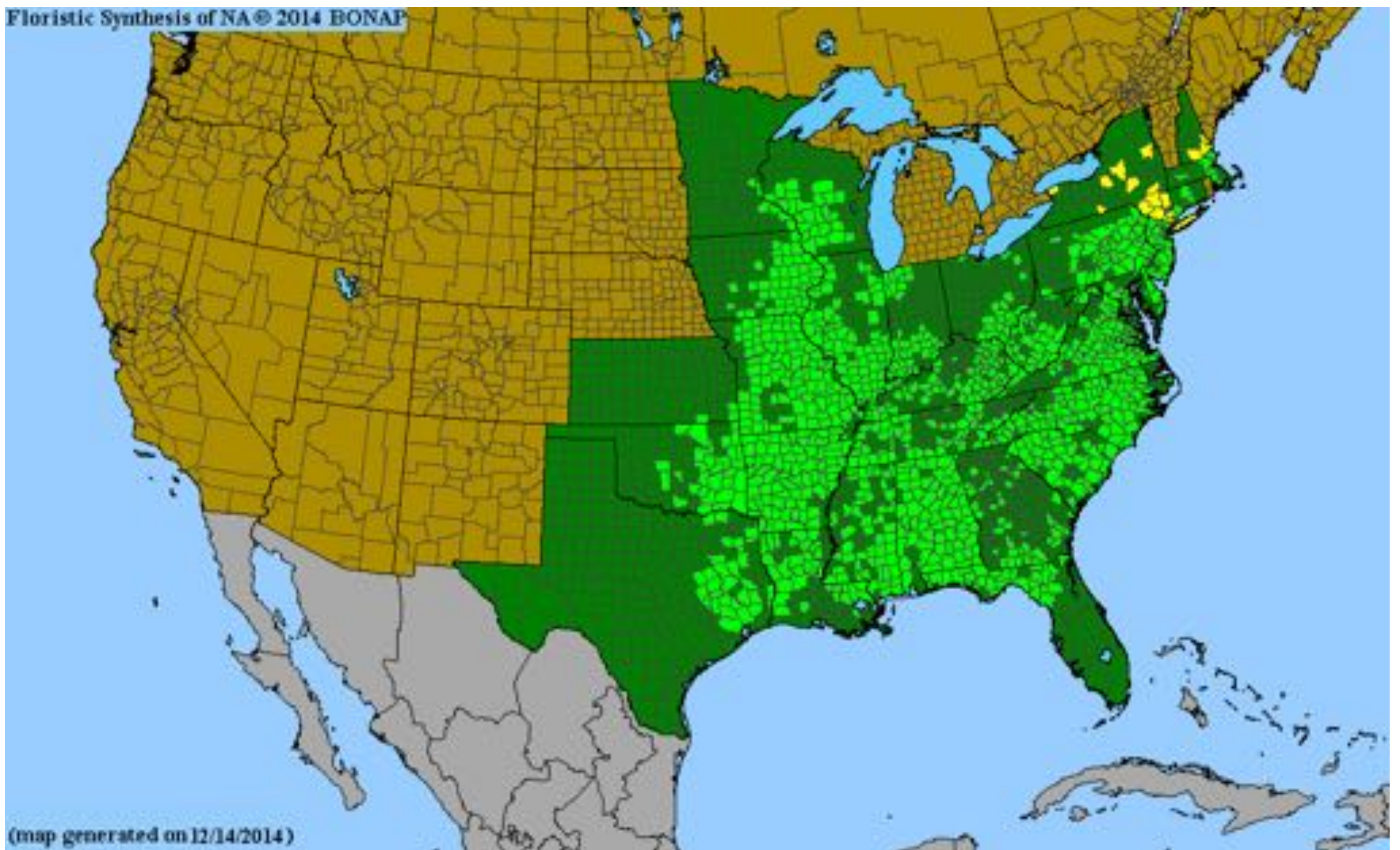
[John Ruter, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org](#)



Medium to dark green doubly toothed leaves growing alternately on the stem. Roughly triangular to diamond shape. Change to yellow in fall.

Betula nigra

River Birch Native Range



Data from The Biota of North America Program (BONAP)

Betula nigra

River Birch Uses

Like *B. alleghaniensis* and *B. lenta*, *B. nigra* is a tree native to North America. First Peoples have a connection with these trees, utilizing them for food and medicine, likely for millennia.

Like the other species of Birch we've met, these, too can be tapped for sap. An infusion can be made from the leaves, and the inner bark can be made into a decoction.

River Birch does not have a strong wintergreen scent and taste like *B. alleghaniensis* and *B. lenta*.



Betula papyrifera

Paper Birch



A smaller species than the previously mentioned Birch trees. Typically reaches around 65 feet (20 m) and sometimes but rarely up to 130 feet (40 m). A short-lived species of Birch, in southern parts of the range may only reach 30 years. Further north where the climate is cooler, they can live up to 100 years.

Betula papyrifera

Paper Birch Bark ID



mature bark

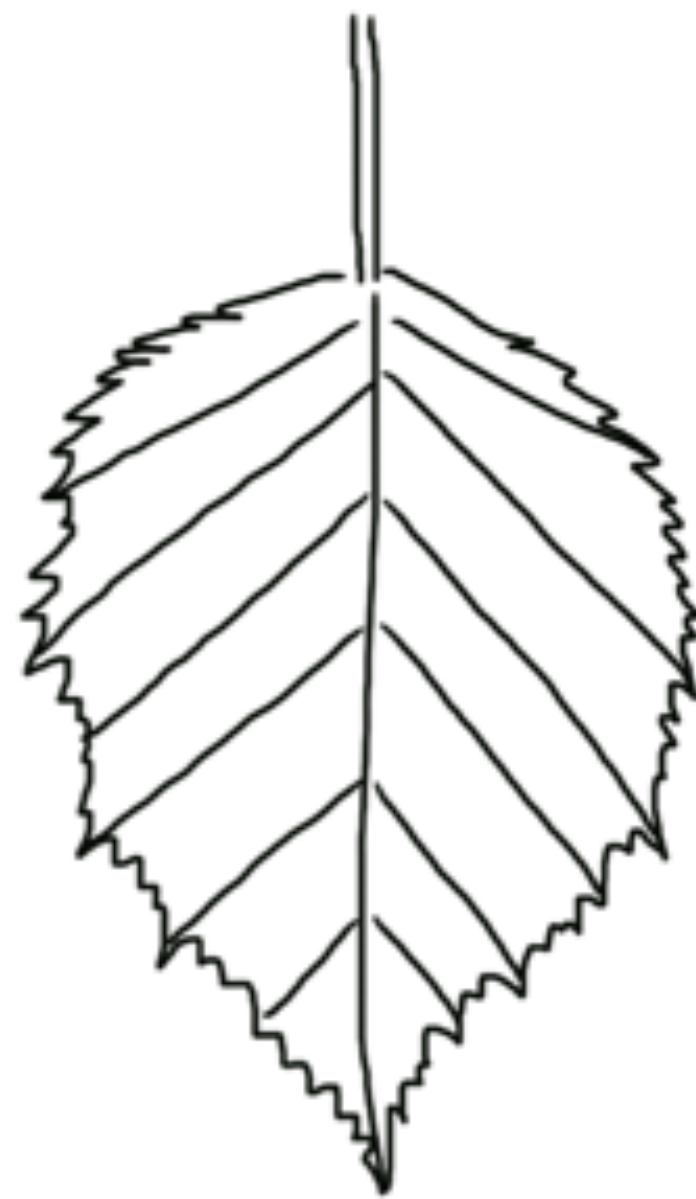


young bark

White bark peels away like strips of paper. Distinguish from other white-barked birches by smoother complexion and inverted V-shaped marks that look like eyes. Contains betulin giving the bark its white color and making it both resistant to the fluctuations of the winter sun and highly flammable. Young bark reddish brown with prominent horizontal lenticels. On mature trees, outer layer may peel away to reveal a salmon to reddish brown layer beneath.

Betula papyrifera

Paper Birch Leaf ID

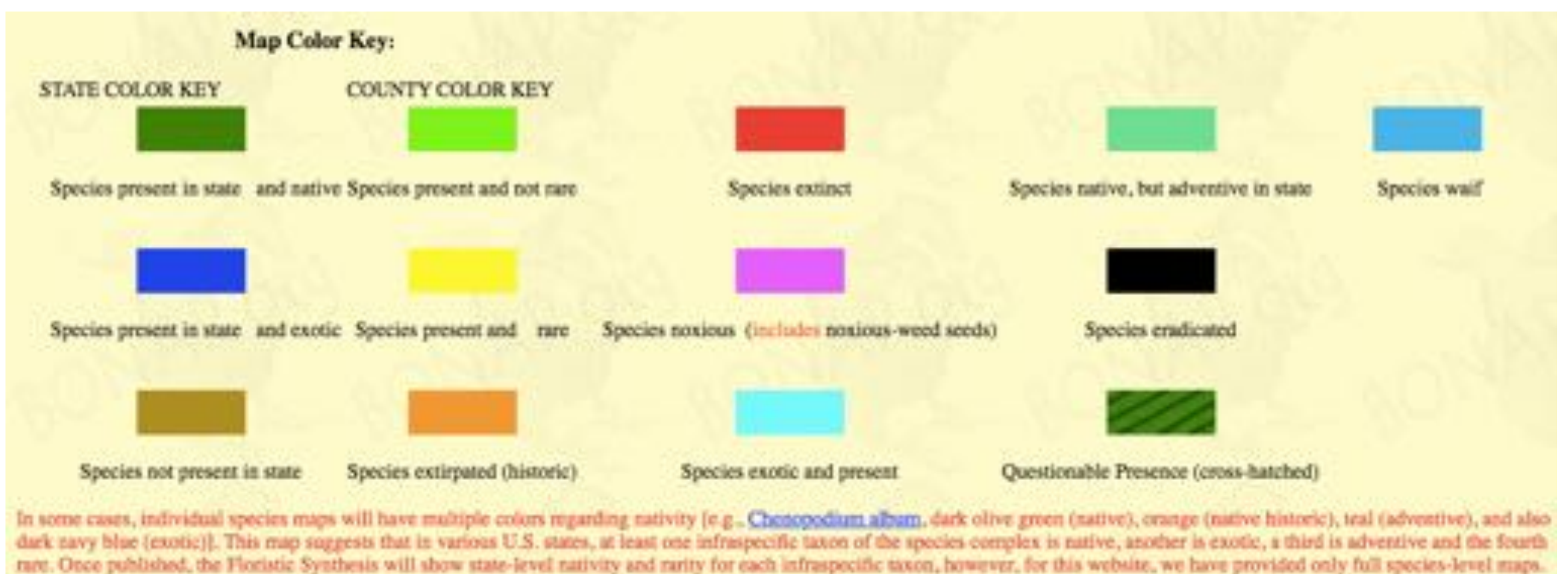
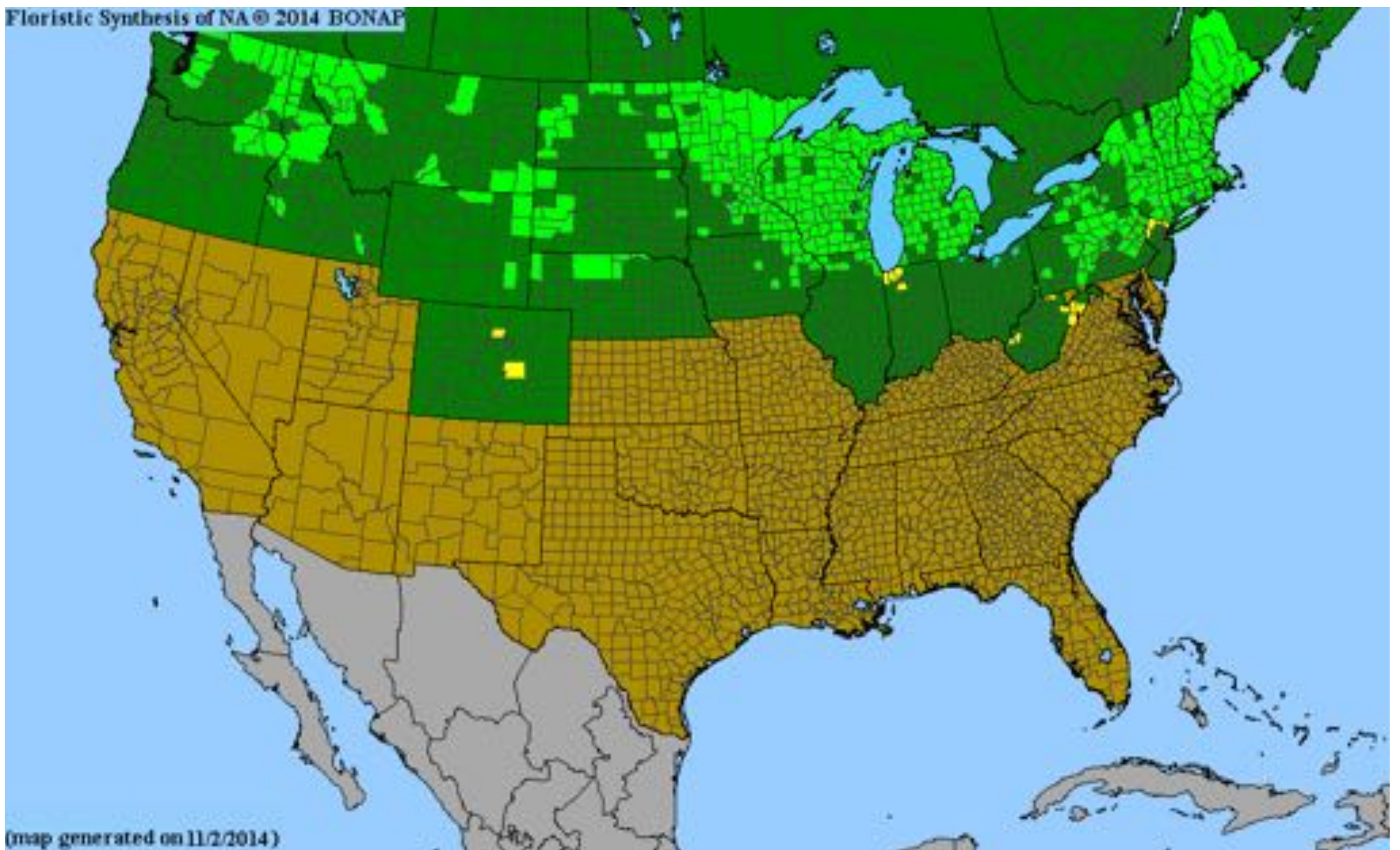


Keith Kanoti, Maine Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Roughly triangular to ovate doubly serrated (toothed) leaves are bright-dark green on surface and slightly fuzzy (pubescent) along the veins on the underside. Parallel veins reach the margins of the leaf, which has fine sharp teeth. The tip of the leaf is tapered to a point, the base is slightly rounded.

Betula papyrifera

Paper Birch Native Range



Data from The Biota of North America Program (BONAP)

Betula papyrifera

Paper Birch Uses

B. papyrifera is also known as Canoe Birch, as this species has been traditionally used to make canoes in the cooler northern and western regions where they grow larger and older than in more southerly climes. (See next page for range map.)

Like the other species of Birch previously mentioned, *B.*

papyrifera can be:

tapped for sap

harvested for bark

made into an infusion or decoction
as well as other applications, which
you'll learn about in later lessons.

B. papyrifera is a preferred species for writing on and for using as fire starter. The outer paper-like bark easily peels away and contains higher amounts of betulin – the substance that makes it white and highly flammable – than other species.



Betula pendula

European or Silver Birch



[John Ruter, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org](http://Bugwood.org)

Medium-sized Birch native to Eurasia and naturalized in North America. Can reach 49 to 80 feet (15 to 25 m), and upwards of 100 feet (31 m). The typically pendulous branches earned it the species name *pendula*.

Betula pendula

European or Silver Birch Bark ID



mature bark



young bark

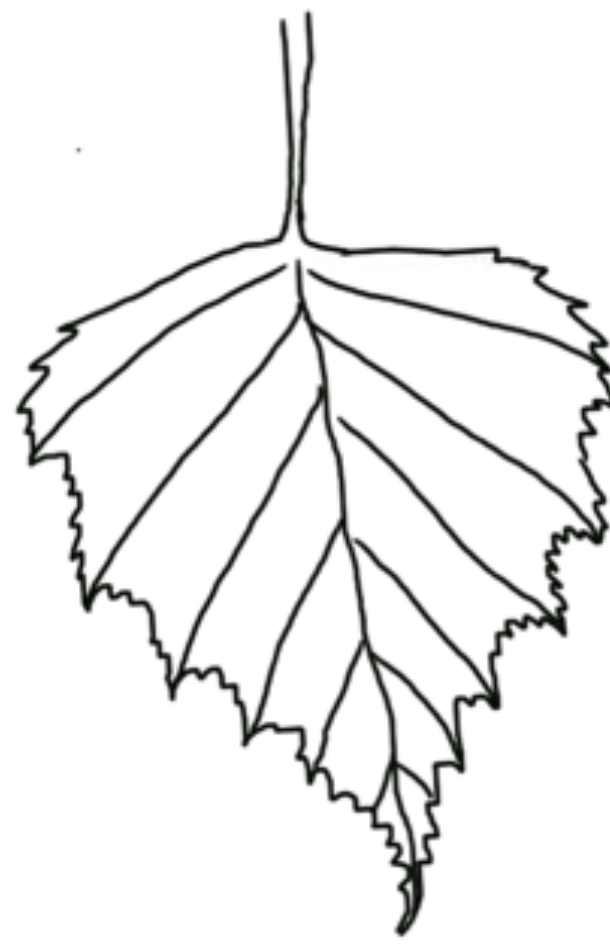
Mature bark is white and powdery-papery and sometimes flaky, rather than peeling-papery. This and the dark black lenticels and triangular marks distinguish this species from *B. papyrifera*. Young bark is bronze with prominent horizontal stripes.

Betula pendula

European or Silver Birch Leaf ID



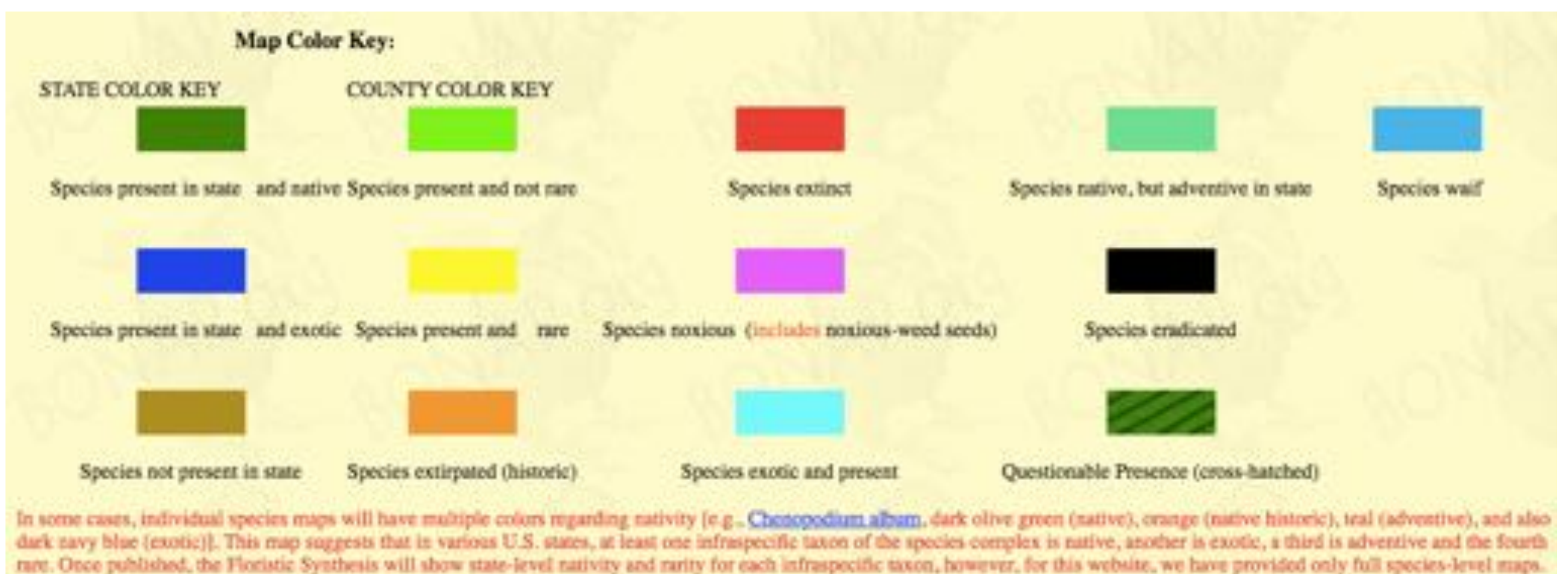
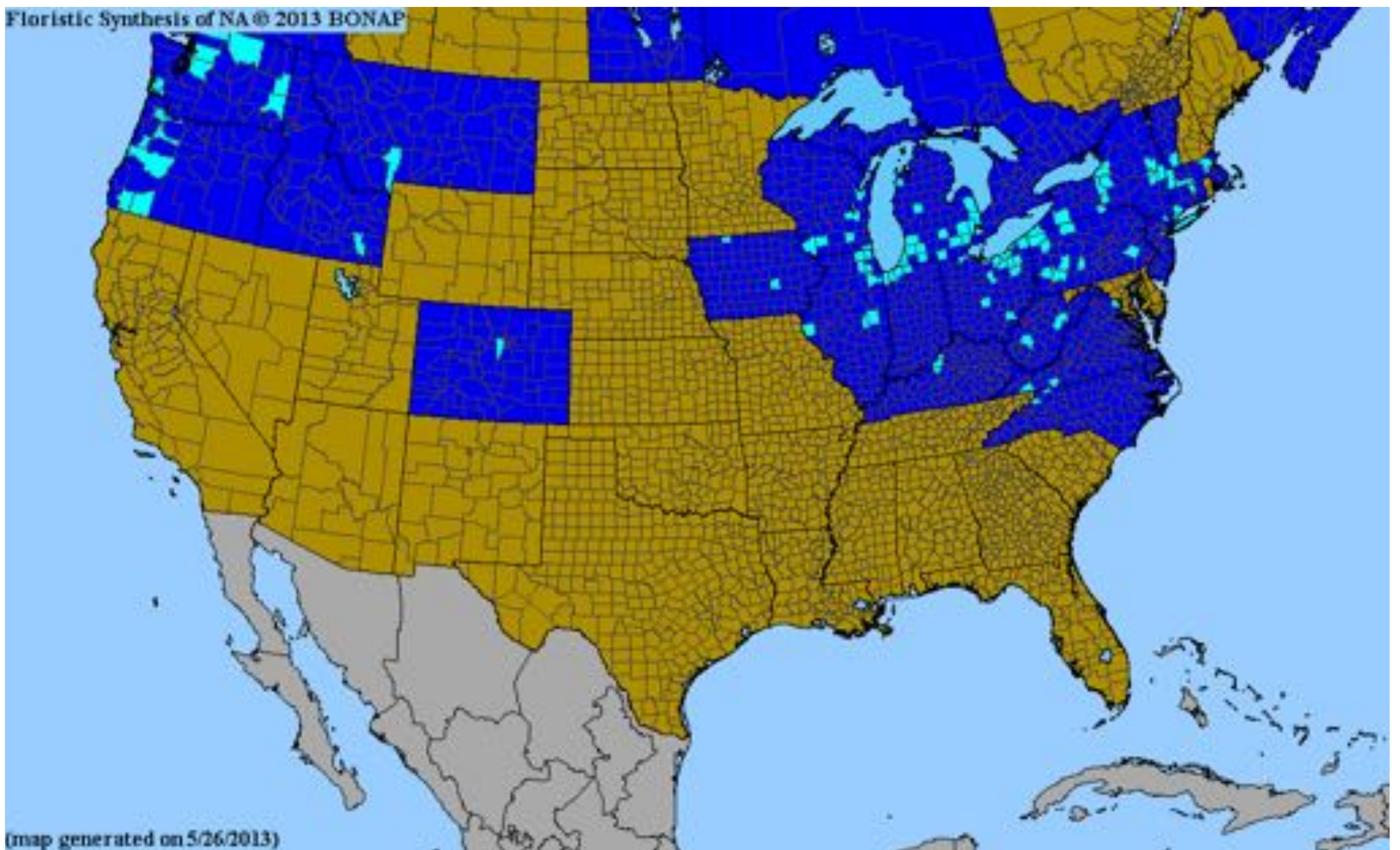
[Tom DeGomez, University of Arizona, Bugwood.org](#)



Leaves are dark green and roughly triangular with doubly toothed margins. The veins are not as distinctly parallel as on previously described species. The teeth can be exaggerated and the tip of the leaf tapers to a narrow point.

Betula pendula

European or Silver Birch Naturalized Range



Data from The Biota of North America Program (BONAP)

Betula pendula

European or Silver Birch Uses

Like other species of Birch, *B. pendula* can be tapped for sap. The bark, leaves, catkins, and twigs can be utilized for medicine.

Like *B. papyrifera*, *B. pendula* is traditionally used for lighting fires. It is likely this species of Birch is the one that inspired ancient Celts, as you'll see in the lesson coming next week.



Walter Siegmund

Betula populifolia

Grey Birch



Medium-sized fast growing Birch native to eastern North America. Quickly reaches 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 m), can grow up to 40 feet (12 m). Often grows multiple trunks from the same stump.

Betula populifolia

Grey Birch Bark ID



mature bark



young bark

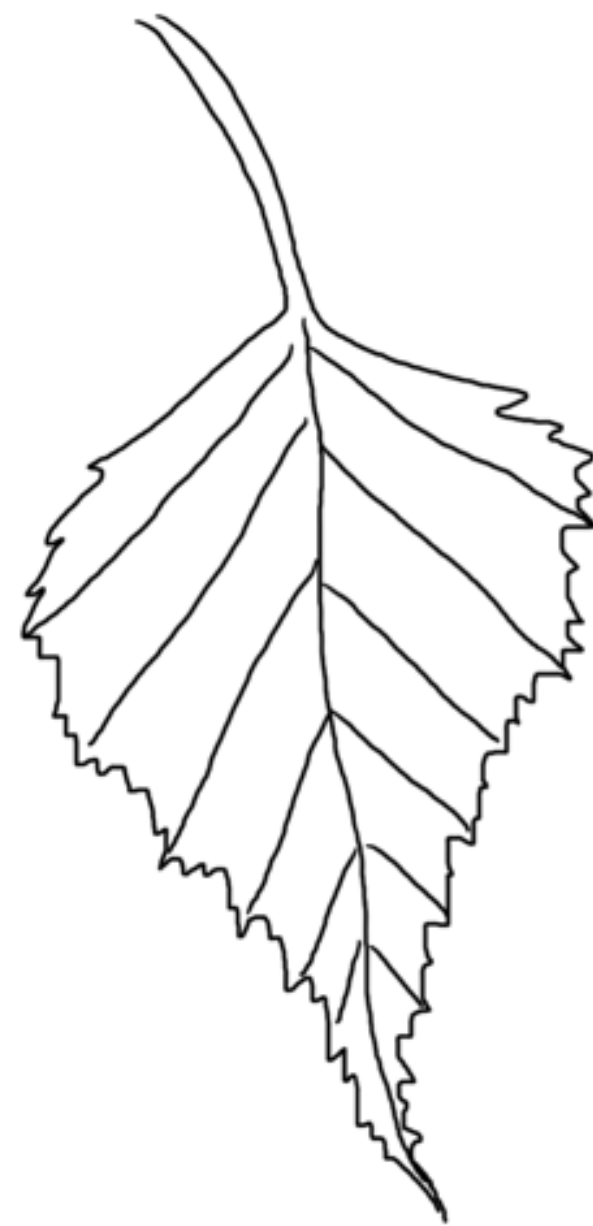
Mature bark is greyish white with a chalky texture; bark cracks and furrows with growth and age. Bark on younger trees begins as golden brown or grey. Trees feature a brown to black triangular pattern at the base of the branch. Distinguish *B. populifolia* from *B. papyrifera* by the smoother bark that doesn't peel away as easily.

Betula populifolia

Grey Birch Leaf ID



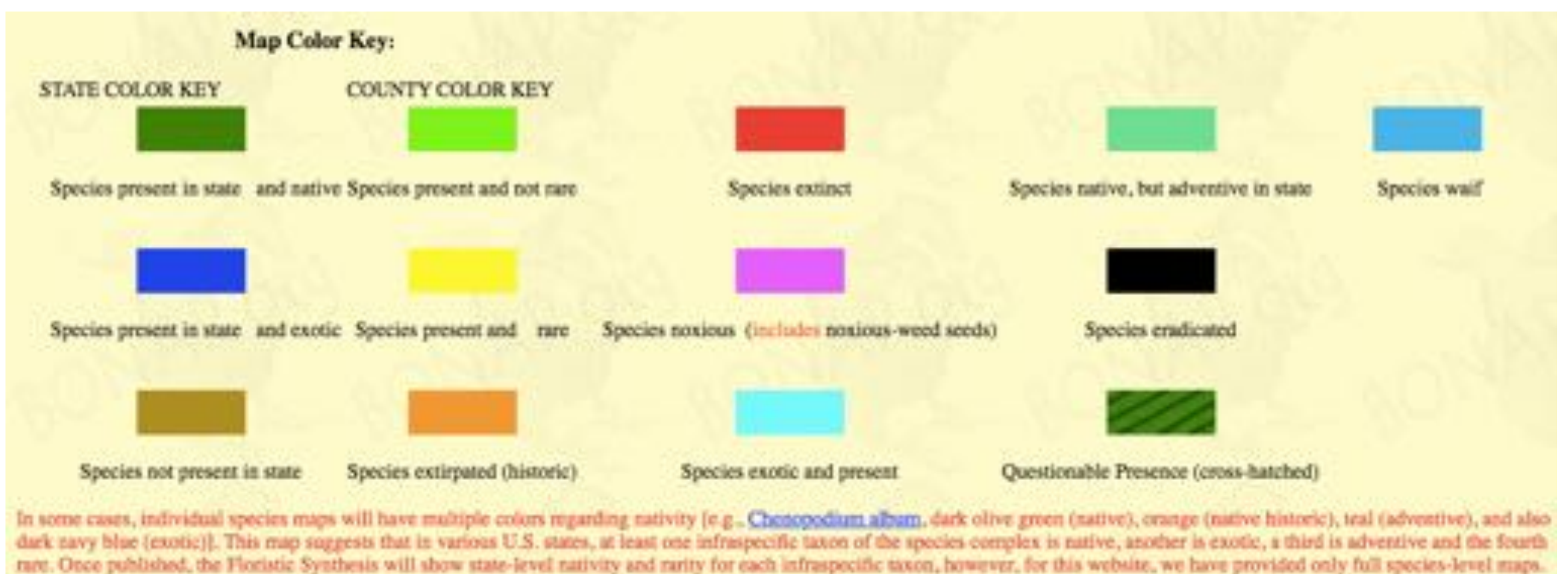
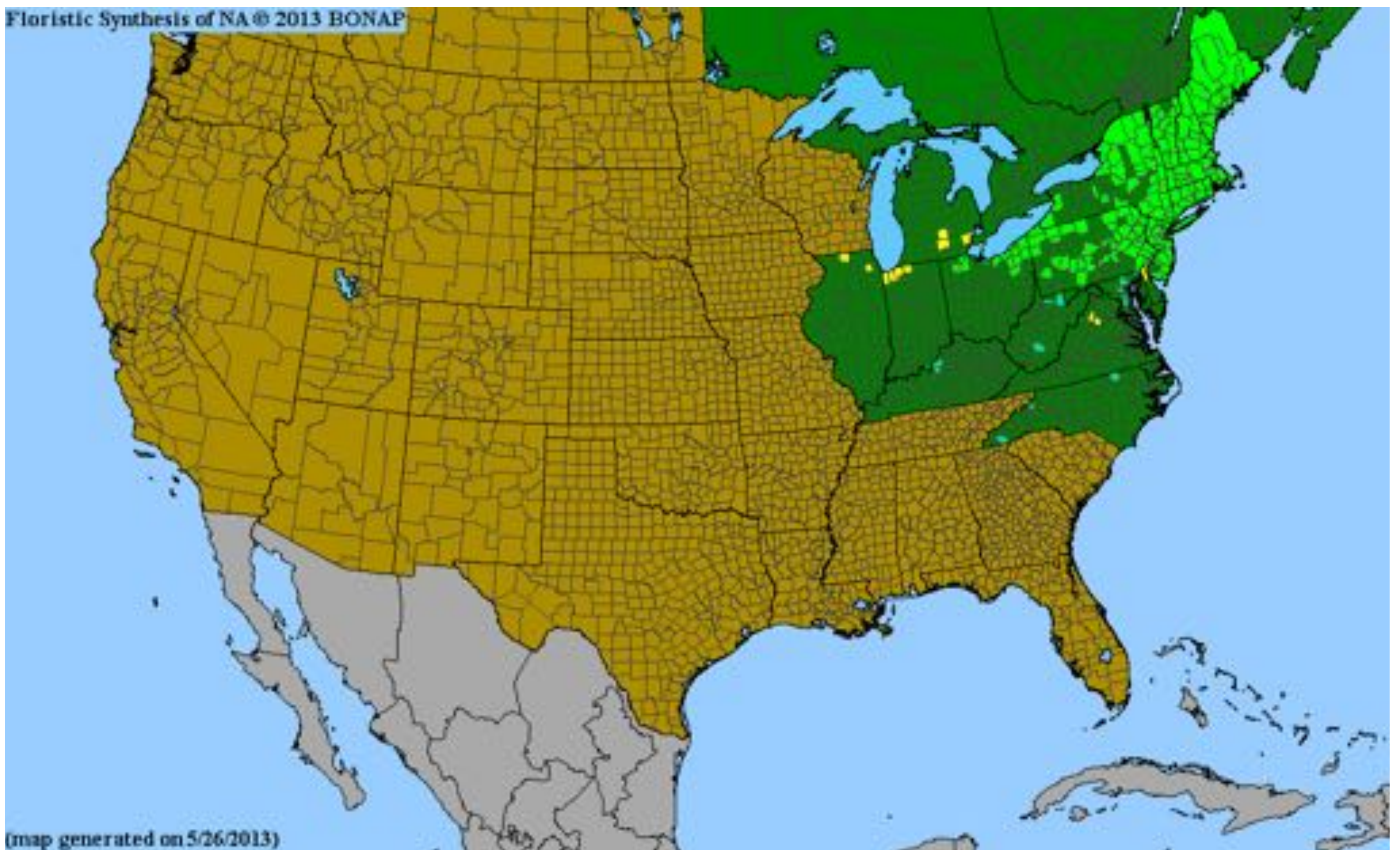
is Sydnor, The Ohio State University, Bugwood.org



Shiny dark green leaves are doubly and finely serrated. Leaves taper to a very distinctive pointy tip. They look most like *B. pendula*, the difference is the finer teeth in the margins.

Betula populifolia

Grey Birch Native Range



Data from The Biota of North America Program (BONAP)

Betula populifolia

Grey Birch Uses

B. populifolia, much like its Birch kin, has edible and medicinal inner bark, leaves, and potable sap.

A range of medicinal uses by Eastern Woodland Peoples will be described in the next lesson.



Go out & find Birch growing near you

Think of a place near you that Birch would like to grow.
Do you know of any open or cleared forested areas, or
wet places?

What tools do you have available to find Birch?

Use your awareness of your environment mixed with
imagination. Travel in your mind to a Birch grove. You can
use the Elen of the Ways meditation if you want to go
deeper, setting the intention to find a Birch grove.

Here are some other tools to help:

[iNaturalist](#)

[USDA PLANTS](#)

[Go Botany](#) (New England)

[BONAP](#)

[NatureServe EXPLORER](#)



assignment



What will you offer Birch?

Go back to the meditation from earlier in this lesson or consider a different intention.

Some ideas:

Fragrant herbs

Crystals or stones

A song or poem

Your hair

Honey, a gift traditionally left by Celtic peoples

Tobacco, an offering made by First Peoples of

Turtle Island (N. America)

offerings

references

Biota of North American Plants (BONAP). Birch. Accessed February 25, 2021. Available at:

<http://bonap.net/Napa/TaxonMaps/Genus/County/Betula>

Neves, Liz. *Northeast Medicinal Plants: Identify, Harvest, and Use III Wild Herbs for Health and Wellness*. Portland, OR: Timber Press. 2020.

Pike, Sue. Nature News: Birch bark is waterproof and flammable. Accessed February 25, 2021. Available at: <https://www.fosters.com/news/20190129/nature-news-birch-bark-is-waterproof-and-flammable>

Plants for a Future. Accessed February 27, 2021. Available at: <https://pfaf.org/user/Default.aspx>

Wojtech, Michael. *Bark. A Field Guide to Trees of the Northeast*. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England. 2011.

INFUSE



birch

module 3.1 – wildcraft

Gathering
GROUND

INFUSE

Welcome to part 3!

This week we'll explore ethical wildcrafting of Birch bark and work with bark in craft, ceremony, and making medicine.

We'll also tap into the heart center as a place for communicating with plants.

All of the activities within are suggestions for ways to connect with Birch.

There's no rush, no set order, and no obligation to do them all. Let the projects call to you as they will. And most of all, have fun with it!

Much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'LJ' in a cursive, flowing style.



meditation

Dropping into the Heart

The intention of this meditation is to tap into the heart's potential to be an organ of perception and communication, in order to connect more deeply with the healing plants.

Click the image below to begin...



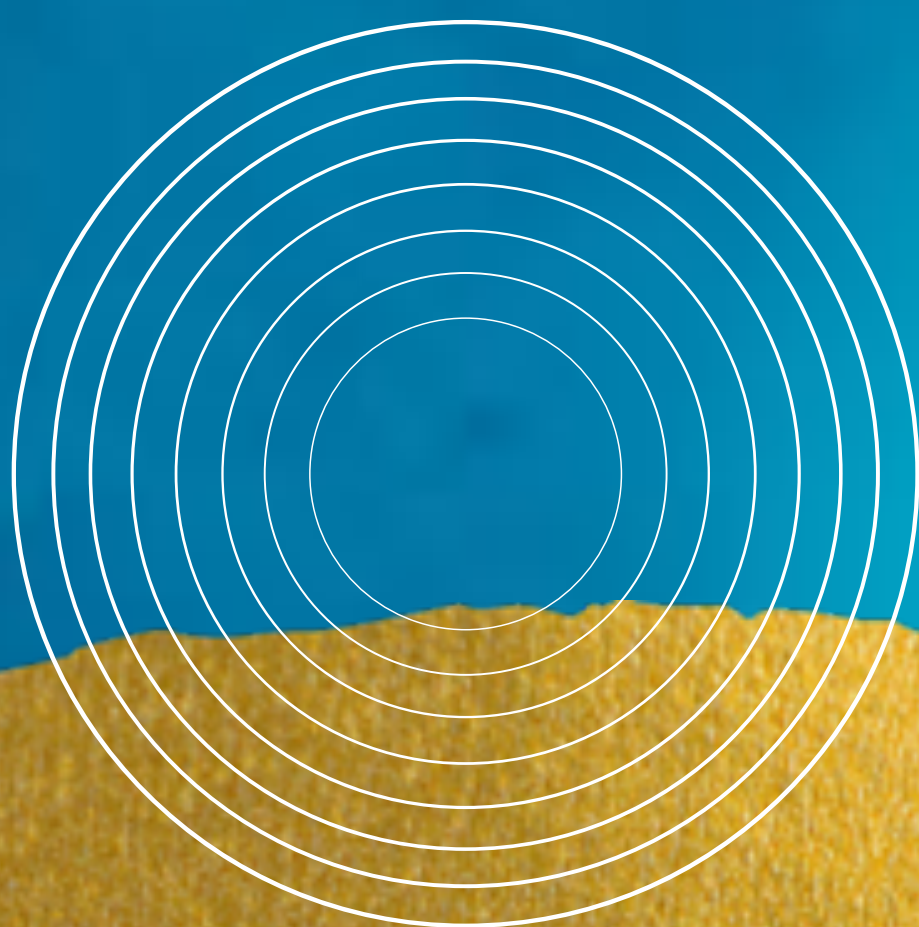
What are you bringing to Birch?



a poem
a song
honey
fragrant herbs
tobacco
hair
a stone
an action
something sweet

Let Birch tell you what they would like.
Tell them your intentions for their medicine.

Nurture reciprocity.



offering

wildcraft

Harvesting Birch Bark

Traditional ways of wildcrafting Birch bark directly from the trunk of a living tree require years of practice. The techniques that honor the tree and protect it from damage are passed down through generations.

Describing it here or showing it in a video doesn't quite do it justice. Luckily there are ways to acquire medicine that do not require cutting into the bark on the trunk of a living tree.

The most sustainable way to harvest Birch bark is to wait until a strong storm or windy day. Look for a stand of trees that you know well and find freshly downed branches or entire trees to harvest from. Peel away the outer bark on young branches to reveal the medicinal (green) inner bark. When scraping from Cherry and Yellow Birch, you'll receive an aromatherapy treatment as you remove the bark! Twigs, catkins, and leaves make good medicine, too.

You can harvest branches and twigs from the tree without risking damage to the vital active phloem layer in the inner bark that transports nutrients throughout the tree.

wildcraft

Click the image below to learn more
about wildcrafting from Birch



Note: Don't take from Grandmother trees. You'll like know them when you meet them. Leave them offerings instead.

wildcraft

Watch a video about traditional Birch Bark harvesting

from the trunk, by members of Pine Creek First Nations in Manitoba, Canada. Note that in the video, Poplar is actually Paper Birch. (The feature on Birch begins around 9:30.)

Sharing Medicines: Balsam Bark, Poplar Bark,
Sage, Sweetgrass, and Wihkes.

Produced by: Manitoba First Nations Education Resource
Centre (MFNERC)



INFUSE



birch

module 3.2 – the spark

Gathering
GROUND

Birch is the spark
that starts fires of passion,
that lights the way to
our creative potential

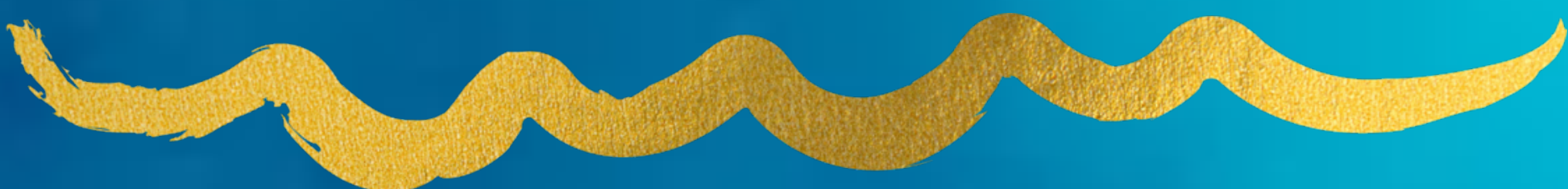


Björk is Icelandic for Birch



image: [Bertrand](#)

Birch means "to shine," "bright"*



*bhereg- Proto-Indo-European root

*Pedaling through
The dark currents
I find
An accurate copy
A blueprint
Of the pleasure
In me
A secret code carved, a secret code carved
He offers
A handshake
Crooked
Five fingers
They form a pattern
Yet to be matched
On the surface simplicity
But the darkest pit in me
It's pagan poetry
Pagan poetry
Morsecoding signals
They pulsate and wake me up
From my hibernating
On the surface simplicity
But the darkest pit in me
It's pagan poetry
Pagan poetry...*



pagan poetry.

Brigid

Goddess Brigid

(Bride, pronounced 'breed')

like Birch, means shining one.

She is a goddess of creativity, inspiration, the fire of the forge, sacred wells, and weaving threads and words in poetry.



In places around the world where birch grows, people have been called to utilize birch for writing, often sacred things.

These are the notes of a 13th century Russian boy named Onfime (Anthemius of Novgorod)

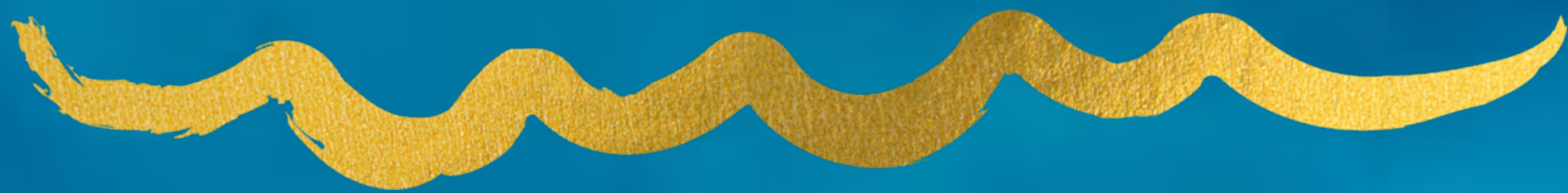


writing

writing

The Anishinaabe People who practice Midewiwin (one translation is "The Way of the Heart") carry an ancient tradition of writing on

Birch bark scrolls called mide-wiigwaas or wiigwaasabak (wiigwaasabakoon, plural). Bone, metal, wood, or porcupine quills could be used as a stylus for writing geometric glyphs conveying sacred stories, songs, or lessons.



Ancient Buddhist texts written in the Gāndhārī language on Birch, from the 1st Century CE:



from The British Library.

Birch bark is a very important gift for a variety of reasons. Thanks to its waterproof nature, the bark of Birch – most often Paper Birch (*Betula papyrifera*) – has been traditionally used as a fire starter and to make cookware, storage containers, baskets, canoes, shelter covers.



avardh on Unsplash

traditions

Wiinabozho

An Ojibwe Tale Of Wiinabozho & The Birch Tree

Once there was a spirit-boy, who was named Nanabozho or Trembling Tail by his grandmother Nookomis, and who taught the Ojibwe Anishinaabeg how to live in the natural world...

This is a tale told in various ways, but it usually includes the hero Wiinabozho (also, Wenabozho, Nanabozho, and more), the Birch tree, Thunderbird, and Lightning.

Visit [this site by Zhaawano Art](#) for a rich resource of Anishinaabe Birch tree traditions, including the story cited above. (also linked in this image:)



New beginnings fire ceremony

Think of something you'd like to start, or something just beginning that you'd like to bless. A new job, a new home, a new love, a new friendship, a new endeavor of any kind.

Write your intention or prayer on a piece of Paper or River Birch bark. Use whatever tool you'd like to write your message to the Universe. In the video (linked below), for example, I used a Hawthorn thorn to write my message.

When you are finished, prepare to light a fire. Gather the materials you need to do so. Please, light the fire outside. If you don't have a yard, you can find a public barbecue or bring a flame proof container outside to a park.

Optional additions to the ceremony: fragrant herbs to burn, a small altar with sacred objects, offerings for the land.

Once you have everything set up, you can speak your prayer or intention aloud or silently to yourself. You may also choose to do this on the New or Full Moon. It is your ceremony, so it is up to you! Then light the piece of Birch bark and use it to light the fire. It burns readily and quickly.

Click the flame to
play the video!



Beithe

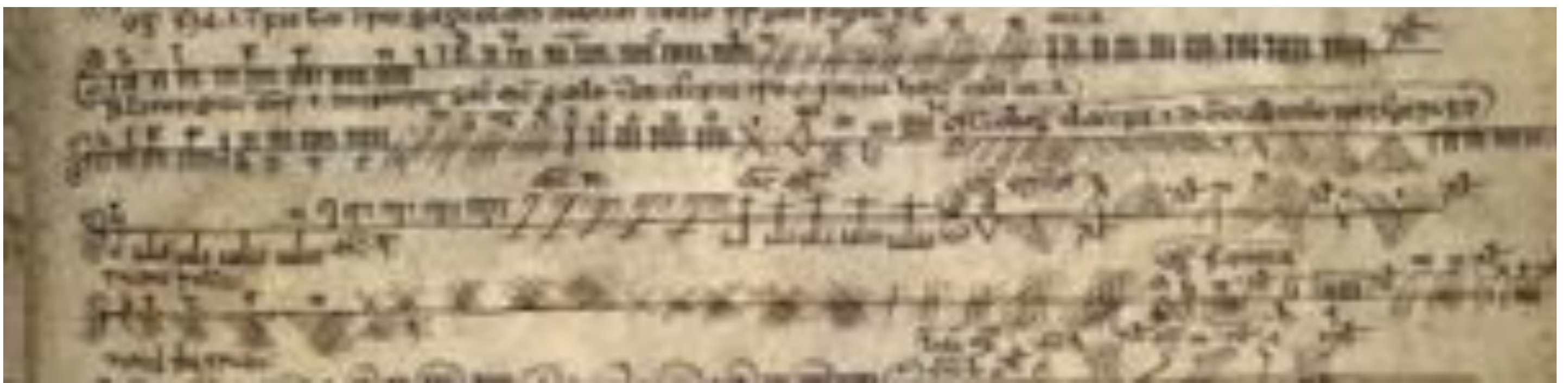
In the Celtic Ogham,
Beithe
is for Birch, once again,
representing new beginnings



It is the first letter in the Ogham, and Birch is said to be the first material the Ogham was written on by the god Ogma. He wrote a warning to sun god Lugh that his wife* was going to be abducted by the Sidhe (fairy folk).

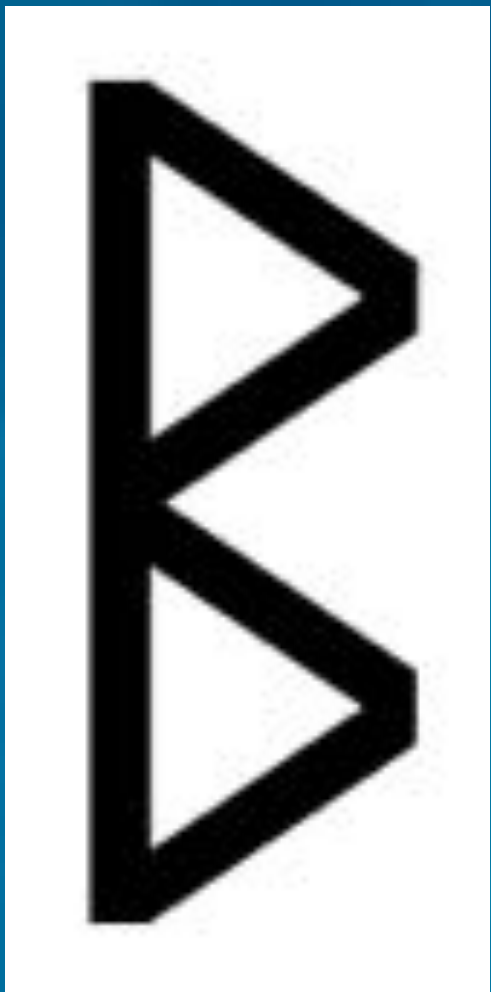
*Would be nice to know what her name was.

Apparently he had many wives.



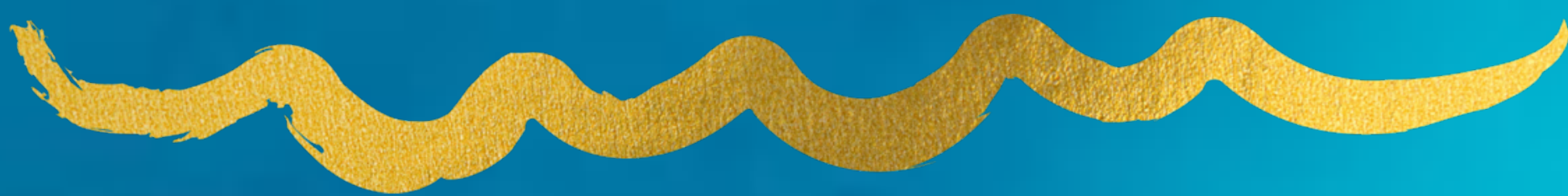
Berkana

In the Elder Futhark Runes, Berkana (alt Berkano, Berkanan) represents the Birch tree.



Berkana is the Earth Goddess, sometimes in the form of Freya, Frigg, Holda, Bercht.

The rune symbolizes birth, refuge, motherhood, protection, healing, fertility, creativity, and change



There's even an alcoholic spirit made from Birch and named after Freya



Make a Berkana rune or Beith ogham stave

Mindfully prune a small branch from a Birch tree,
1 to 1 1/2 inch in diameter.

Cut a stave about 3 to 4 inches in length.

Scrape away a roughly oval-shaped section from the center
of the outer bark to reveal the pale inner bark.

Save the outer and green bark for medicine.

Carve or burnish the symbol into the inner bark.

Charge the symbol with your intentions for new beginnings.

When your intentions manifest, release your stave to the
water, bury it, or burn it in a fire

Watch how to make your own Birch stave for intention and manifestation.



create

Birch medicine

Tastes & Energetics

pungent, bitter, astringent, stimulating, drying, warming or cooling

Internal Uses

Birch is diuretic, helping to relieve edema, rheumatism, arthritis, and gout. Drinking a birch bark decoction can help break up kidney stones, or alleviate bladder irritation or infection.

Birch is useful for alleviating symptoms of respiratory infection. Drinking an infusion or decoction of the leaves and/or bark helps open the pores to aid the body in diaphoresis or sweating to break a fever. Breathing in the aromatic oils in a steam clears congestion.

The bitterness of the bark indicates its ability to stimulate bile to tone the liver and aid elimination of waste. Birch bark decoction or birch sap are used traditionally, along with other detoxifying herbs, as a cleansing spring tonic.





Standard infusion of dried leaves or
standard decoction of dried bark
Suggested Use: Drink 4 ounces 3 times per day.
Use externally as a hair and scalp rinse.

Infused oil

1 part fresh bark, leaf buds, leaves, and/or twigs
2 parts oil of choice (olive, almond, sesame, etc.)

For twigs, expose as much of the inner bark
as possible by scraping away the outer bark.

Chop bark, buds, and leaves before adding
oil to infuse.

Suggested Use: Apply topically to sore muscles or
inflamed skin conditions.

Tincture

1 part fresh bark, leaf buds, leaves, and/or twigs
2 parts menstruum (70% alcohol, 30% water)

or

1 part dried bark, leaf buds, leaves, and/or twigs
5 parts menstruum (50% alcohol, 50% water)

Take 20–30 drops 3 times per day.



preparations

Birch beer

Birch bark and twigs have been traditionally used both medicinally and as flavoring agents for food and medicine by people of the Eastern Woodlands.

The modern version of the Northeastern specialty soda Birch beer has its roots in 17th century Pennsylvania where it was originally brewed as a fermented (alcoholic) beverage.

You can try this recipe with any of the Birches, though I prefer the strong spicy-sweet wintergreen taste of Cherry and Yellow Birch (*Betula lenta* & *B. alleghaniensis*) to make syrup for this classic soda.

The first step in making Birch beer is a decoction, which if you strain it off before reducing it, you can drink as a medicinal beverage, or use as a poultice, bath tea, or wash.

Follow the link in the image below to learn how to make your very own Birch Beer.



External Uses of Birch

Birch is astringent and anodyne, containing salicylates and methyl salicylates, the precursor to aspirin. The bark and leaves tone skin while relieving pain and itching.

Traditionally, First Peoples utilize powdered Paper Birch bark to treat rashes, including diaper rash.

Birch leaf makes a great rinse for itchy, scaly scalp. Adding a strong infusion or decoction of the twigs and leaves to a bath is a nice way to alleviate itchy, dry winter skin. You can make a wash or poultice of the leaves and twigs for eczema and psoriasis by infusing or gently simmering these parts in water for 20 minutes or so, then straining.

Birch buds and twigs make an excellent massage oil for sore muscles and joints.

Learn how to craft Birch bark-infused oil in this video:



medicine craft

references

Eco Enchantments. The Magic of the Ogham Trees: Birch - Beith.

Accessed January 9, 2021. Available at:

http://www.ecoenchantments.co.uk/myogham_birchpage.html

Geniusz, Mary Siisip. Plants Have So Much to Give Us, All We Have to Do is Ask: Anishinaabe Botanical Teachings. University of Minnesota Press. 2015.

Meredith, Leda. Northeast Foraging: 120 Wild and Flavorful Edibles from Beach Plums to Wineberries. Portland, OR: Timber Press. 2014.

Moerman, Daniel E. Native American Medicinal Plants: An Ethnobotanical Dictionary. Portland, OR: Timber Press. 6th Edition. 2017.

Neves, Liz. Northeast Medicinal Plants: Identify, Harvest, and Use 111 Wild Herbs for Health and Wellness. Portland, OR: Timber Press. 2020.

Online Etymology Dictionary. Birch. Accessed January 12, 2021.

Available at: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/birch>

Pike, Sue. Nature News: Birch bark is waterproof and flammable.

Accessed February 25, 2021. Available at:

<https://www.fosters.com/news/20190129/nature-news-birch-bark-is-waterproof-and-flammable>

Rune Secrets. Accessed January 12, 2021. Available at:

<https://runesecrets.com/rune-meanings/berkano>

Runes. Accessed January 12, 2021. Available at:

<http://elderfutharkrunes.blogspot.com/2010/11/berkana.html>

Salmón, Enrique. IWÍGARA: The Kinship of Plants and People.

Timber Press. 2020.

The Druid's Garden. Sacred Tree Profile: Birch's Medicine, Magic, Mythology, and Meaning. Accessed January 9, 2021. Available at:

<https://druidgarden.wordpress.com/2018/12/09/sacred-tree-profile-birchs-medicine-magic-mythology-and-meaning/>

INFUSE



birch

module 4 - purification

Gathering
GROUND

INFUSE

Hello & Happy Spring!

This week's theme is Spring Cleansing or purification. We'll explore a couple of Birch spring cleaning rituals for your body and your home.

We'll also make the connections between Birch and brooms and fungi and flying witches.

We'll learn about tapping Birch trees for sap, and how to make a spring tonic and a salve.

It's gonna be fun!

Many blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz', with a large, flowing 'L' and a cursive 'y'.

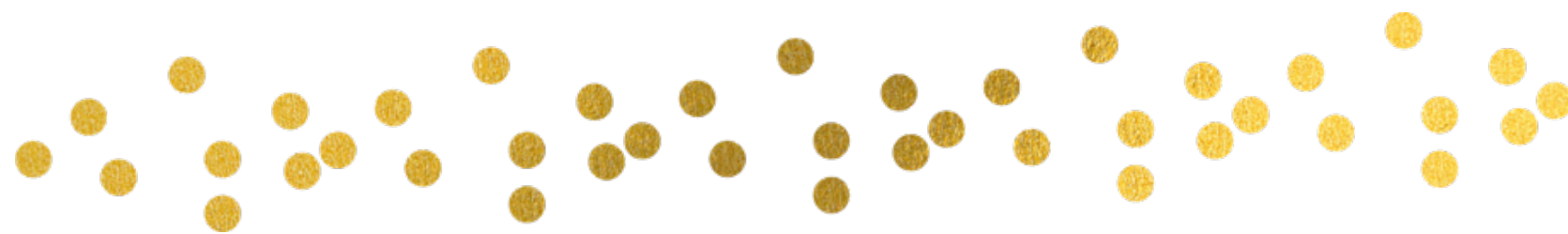


Birch facts

Betula species

Family – Betulaceae

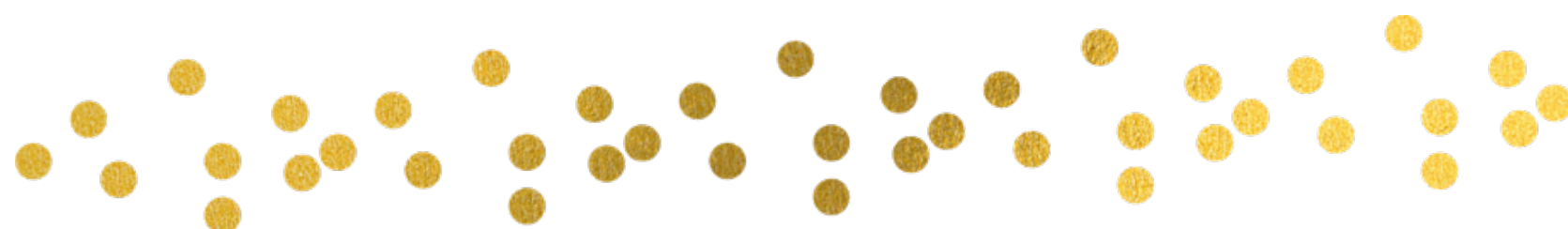
There are about 50 species of Birch in the world,
potentially 15 species native to North America



Parts used – bark, catkins, leaf buds, leaves, sap, twigs



Known chemical constituents – pentacyclic triterpenes (ursolic acid, betulinic acid and betulin), salicylate, methyl salicylate, saponins, bitters, glycosides and flavonoids (incl. hyperoside, quercitrin, myricetin galactoside, kaempferol, myricetin and quercetin glycosides)



Select actions – alterative (detoxifying), anodyne, anti-inflammatory, anti-rheumatic, anti-septic, cytotoxic (anti-tumor), diaphoretic, diuretic

wildcraft

Tapping for Sap

The time for tapping for Birch: during the Spring thaw, before the tree leafs out, a bit later than Maple tapping season.

What you'll need:

- Twig or drill and spile
- Lightweight food grade bucket or water bottle
 - Cheesecloth or other filter
 - Cooking pot
 - Heat source
 - Candy thermometer
 - Storage container

Before starting, make sure all of your equipment is scrubbed clean with hot water, especially the spile (if you are using one) and collecting vessels.

There are at least two approaches to tapping...



wildcraft

Twig tap method

This method is slower than drilling, but it's kinder to the tree. Find a sturdy twig that measures about 2–3 inches long and 1/4 inch in diameter. The twig can be solid or you can hollow out a thin elder or sumac branch that's 1/2 inch thick or thinner. Whittle down the end of the twig to an angled point with a pocketknife.

Using a hammer or rock, tap the pointed end of the twig into the bark at an upward angle, about 1 inch deep. Just under the twig, tie a bucket around the tree with rope or cut a hole into the side of a plastic bottle to fit over the twig. The sap will start flowing along or through the twig into your vessel. If you've used a solid twig and the sap flows down the bark of the tree instead, carve a channel in the top of the twig to direct the flow of sap.

Keep checking back daily to note your yield and change out the bucket or bottle if it fills.



wildcraft

Drill and spile method

Depending on the size of your spile, select either a $5/16$ or $7/16$ drill bit.

Drill a hole into the trunk of the tree about 3 feet up from the ground and about 1 to 1 1/2 inches deep, either level or at a 10-degree angle upward.

Gently tap the spile in and place the collection bucket under it on a hook.



wildcraft

Processing

Filter the sap you've collected via either method through a fine-mesh sieve, cheesecloth, or coffee filter and store it in the refrigerator or outside (if the temperature is below 40°F) until you are ready to boil it down.

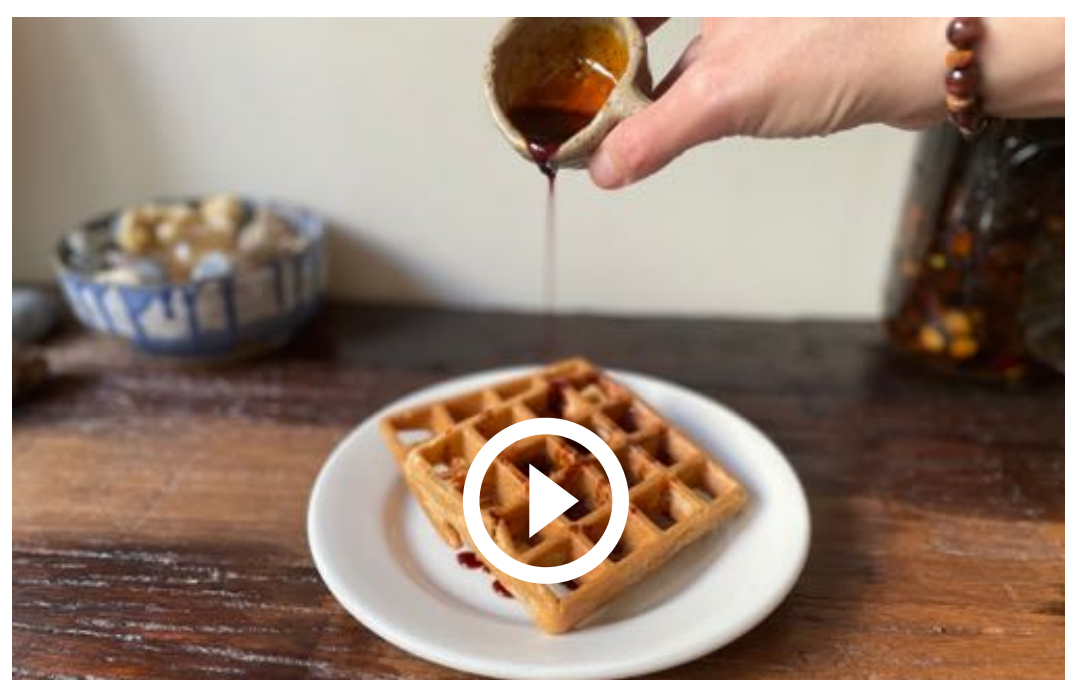
✧ 10 gallons of sap yields about 2 cups syrup. ✧

You'll want to boil the sap somewhere with good ventilation, either outside or with windows open and a good fan going. Boil until reduced by half, then lower to a simmer. When reduced to 1/4 volume, lower the heat until the liquid just steams. Keep the temperature of the liquid at 200 degrees Fahrenheit or lower.

If you have a Brix refractometer, you can measure the sugar content. Birch syrup should be between 66 and 67 Brix.

Shelf life - can the syrup if you don't plan on using it all within 1 week. Canned, it may last 1 year or more.

Click on the waffles to watch a video
on tapping trees for sap





Baba Yaga

The fearsome wise witch Baba Yaga from Russian fairy tale fame lives in a Birch forest. She travels in a mortar using the pestle as her rudder while sweeping her tracks behind her with a Silver birch broom.



From the Dark Goddess Tarot
by Ellen Lorenzi-Prince

Besoms and other brooms are
made from Birch twigs



further linking them with purification
and renewal, as well as connecting
Birch with witches, cunning women,
and wombyn healers



symbolism

create

Make your own Birch besom

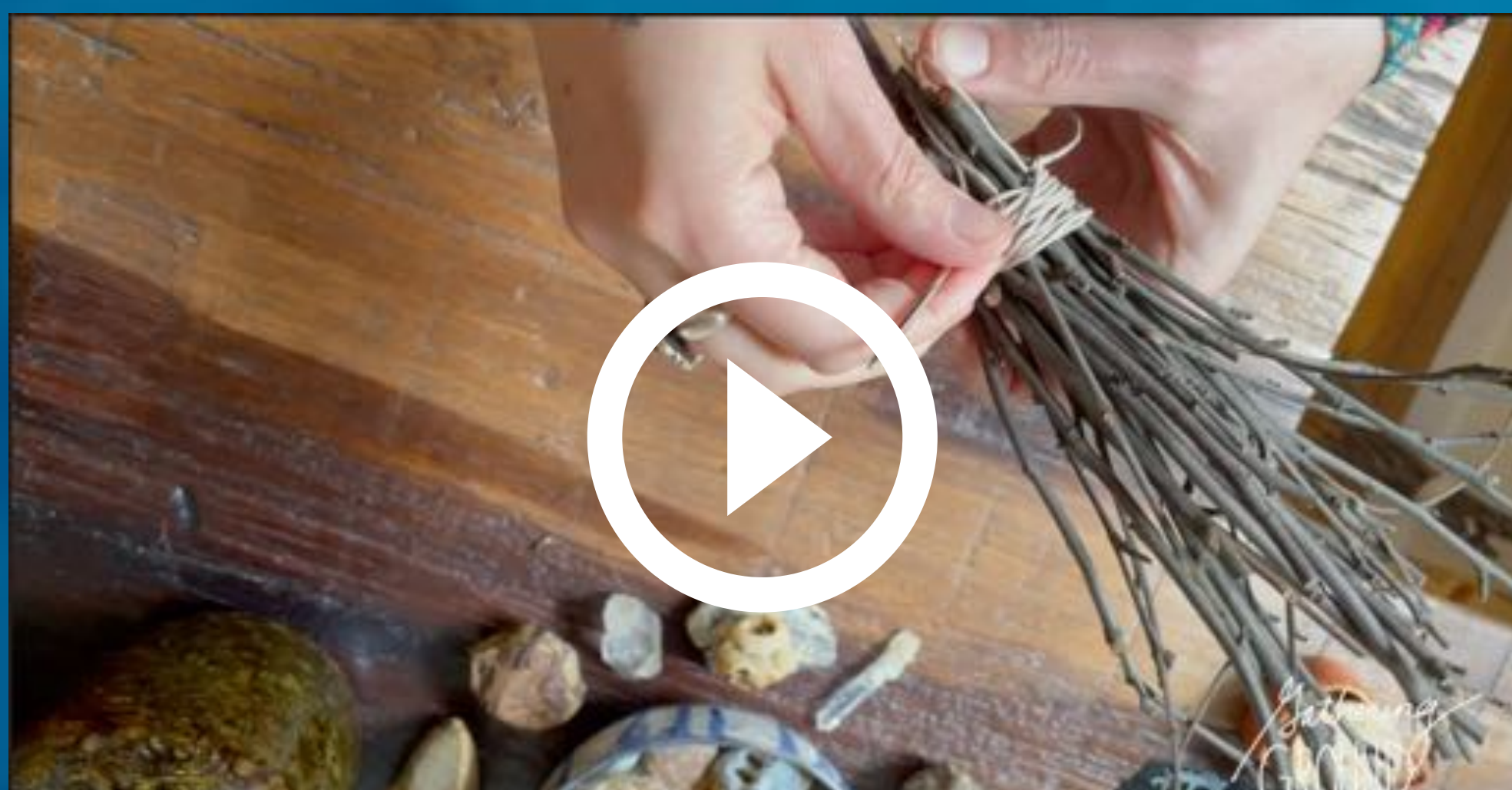
Besom comes from Old English *besma* meaning "bundle of twigs."



Gather fallen twigs or mindfully prune them from a Birch tree. Choose a handle and separate out smaller, thinner twigs to bundle together as the broom.

Use it to physically and energetically clear out your home in a spring cleaning ritual to shoo out the stagnancy of winter and welcome the fresh rebirth of spring.

Watch this video to get an idea of how it can be done.



fungi fun



image: [Björn S.](#)

Chaga (*Inonotus obliquus*),
immune-boosting medicinal
mushrooms, grow on Birch

fungi fun



Dominicus Johannes Bergsma

Birch polypore (*Piptoporus betulinus*),
is another immune-boosting medicinal
mushrooms that grows on Birch



Edward Okún (1872–1945)
Mushroom Mother With Her Children

fungi fun



image: [Anagoria-Natur](#)

Fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) mushrooms grow in Birch forests. Both Siberian and Sámi people of northern Europe partner with this fungus to "fly" the reindeer paths and commune with land spirits.

(I'm not recommending you do this, especially not without direct guidance from a Sámi or Siberian Shaman.)

There's a whole lot more to share about these mushrooms, but this is about Birch so I encourage you to do your own research on them.

[Here's an article](#) I like on the subject.

Birch brooms + Fly agaric = Flying witches



symbolism

create

How to make salve

Once you have made herbal infused oil, you can make salve, ointment, unguent, balm – all words for the same thing, basically a solidified oil that's easily transportable and applicable. Salves are great for applying into wounds, massaging into sore spots, and tending to dry skin. They are also nice to use topically on areas of the body where there may be an energetic imbalance.

In this video, I show you how to make Birch bark salve. Just click the image to get there.



create

Now that you know how to make a salve, you can

make your own {non-toxic} flying ointment

This is a tamer version of the usually toxic flying ointment –
it's certainly perception-shifting nonetheless.



3 parts Birch bark

2 part Mugwort

1 part Wormwood

1 part Rosemary


1 part Sage

1/2 part Lavender

Beeswax

Either heat infuse oil with the above herbs together, or
obtain them separately and combine. Make a salve by gently
melting beeswax into the strained oils. Remember the 4:1 or
8:1 ratio (oil to beeswax), less oil means a harder salve.

Anoint the third eye before meditating, journeying,
dreaming, or other creative endeavors. Or use in massage to
help transcend physical or emotional pain.



In Czech, Brezen
(from br̆ıza
meaning *Birch*)
is the name
for the month
of March

Birch is the
national tree
of Finland
and Russia

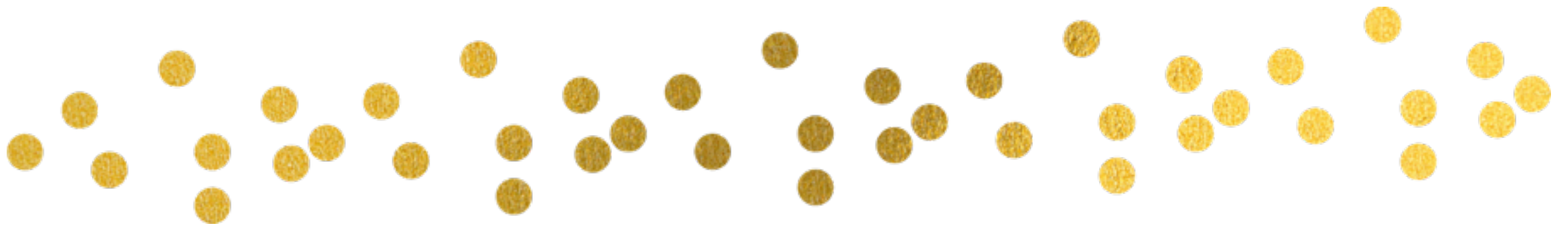
Kostroma

A Slavic goddess of fertility, Kostroma (also Kupala) is said to rest under the Birch tree after the harvest, awaiting the spring awakening.



Birch tree by Nicholas A. Tonelli





Boris Kustodiyev, Russian Venus (1925–1926)

traditions

bath brooms



image: [kallerna](#).

In Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Russia, Siberia, and beyond, there is a practice of using bundles of branches in the shape of a broom to vigorously brush the body. The bundles most often come from Birch, Oak, Pine, Eucalyptus, or Juniper. This beating or brushing imparts the medicinal benefits of the plant, stimulates circulation, and encourages healing. It can support the immune system, promote lymphatic flow, and create a healthy physical and energetic boundary.

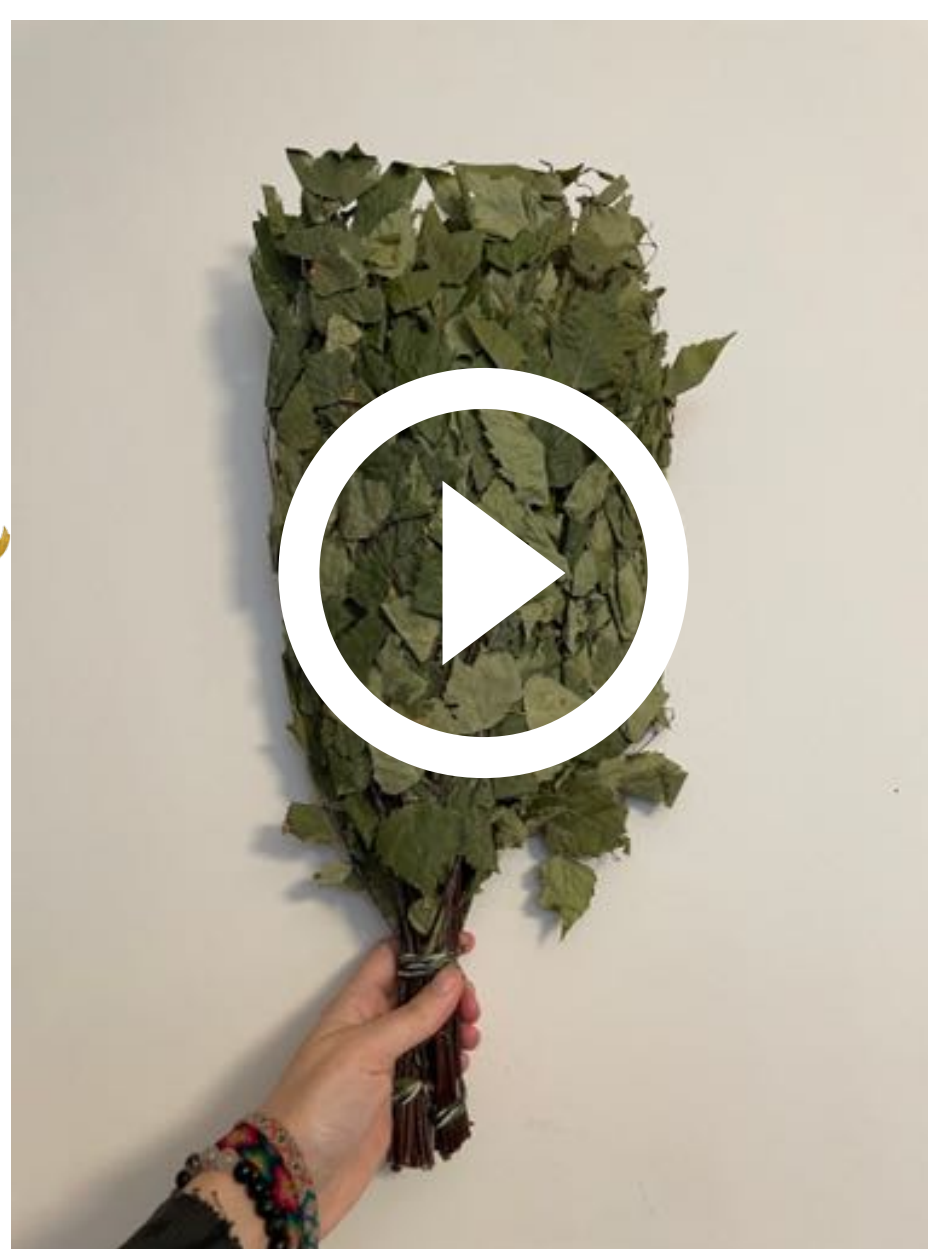
Bath brooms or whisks in their respective languages:
Russian: venik, Yiddish: platza, Finnish: vasta or vihta,
Lithuanian: vanta



In these two videos (external) you can learn how to make your own Birch branch broom for cleansing your body.



Then click the image below to watch a video where I show you how to vasta!



create

wildcraft

Collect the leaves of Birch much like you would the bark, by harvesting small branches or twigs, either by finding them freshly fallen from the tree or by pruning them.

Leaves can be infused in water for tea and either drunk or applied to the skin as a wash, compress, or poultice, just as with the bark.



spring tonic

Birch bark, leaves, and sap are taken in tea as a traditional spring tonic. They can be taken alone or in combination with other spring tonic herbs to get the circulation flowing, help the body eliminate wastes, and cleanse out toxins that may have built up over winter.

Try this basic recipe this spring to get things flowing.

1 part Birch bark
1 part Sassafras root
1 part Cleavers
1 part Dandelion root

Combine herbs in a mixing bowl and measure out 1 tablespoon per cup of water used. Add water and herbs to a saucepan. Gently simmer for 20 minutes, covered. Let steep another 10 minutes, then strain. Drink straight up or add a touch of honey to sweeten.

Drink 2 to 3 cups per day for a week and notice any changes in your digestion, energy levels, and general well being.



disclaimer

The statements herein have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. The recipes and information in this course are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

This course is also not meant to replace medical care. If you are in need of medical assistance, please reach out to a qualified healthcare practitioner.

references

DiPasquale, Robin. The Medicine of The Birch Tree: Beyond Depurative. Naturopathic Doctor News and Review. Accessed March 18, 2021.

Available at:

<https://ndnr.com/botanical-medicine/the-medicine-of-the-birch-tree-beyond-depurative/>

Fernandez, Anna. Chemical Constituents of Birch. Dr. Christopher's Herbal Legacy. Accessed March 18, 2021. Available at:

https://www.herballegacy.com/Birch_Chemical.html#:~:text=Other%20medicinal%20constituents%20in%20Birch,kaempferol%2C%20myricetin%20and%20quercetin%20glycosides.

Joybilee Farm. How to Make Birch Syrup, Even if You Have No Maple Trees.

Accessed March 18, 2021. Available at:

<https://joybileefarm.com/birch-syrup/>

Moerman, Daniel E. Native American Medicinal Plants: An Ethnobotanical Dictionary. Portland, OR: Timber Press. 6th Edition. 2017.

Neves, Liz. Northeast Medicinal Plants: Identify, Harvest, and Use III Wild Herbs for Health and Wellness. Portland, OR: Timber Press. 2020.

Salmón, Enrique. IWÍGARA: The Kinship of Plants and People. Timber Press. 2020.

The Druid's Garden. Sacred Tree Profile: Birch's Medicine, Magic, Mythology, and Meaning. Accessed January 9, 2021. Available at:

<https://druidgarden.wordpress.com/2018/12/09/sacred-tree-profile-birchs-medicine-magic-mythology-and-meaning/>