

Birch(Betula)

Common Names: Silver birch, black birch, sweet birch and white birch.

Location: This herb can be found in areas of Europe and North America.

Description: The flowers, leaves, sap and bark of the birch tree are used medicinally.

Properties: Birch is an anti-inflammant, diuretic and antispasmodic.

Uses: This herb can be used to treat arthritis, muscular pain, kidney stones, premenstrual syndrome, bladder infection, cellulite, cancer and warts.

Doses: Birch is available in tea form.

Warnings: Women who have heart or kidney problems should avoid using birch leave douches. If used, you may experience some side effects.

## **Birch Bark**

### **Also known as**

Betula spp, Betula, Betulae Folium, Betula Pendula, Betula Verrucosa, Downy Birch, Silver Birch, White Birch.

### **Introduction**

The birch is a soft-wood tree native to cold, northerly climates. The name is a very ancient one, probably derived from the Sanskrit bhurga, meaning "tree whose bark is written upon." Birch bark easily peels from the tree, but is slow to decay. Removing the bark from a living tree can threaten the life of the tree if the dark inner bark is damaged, but due to the remarkable preservative properties of birch bark, it can easily be harvested from dead or fallen trees, where it still retains its wonderful properties. Birch bark is strong and water resistant, almost like cardboard in its pliability, and can therefore be bent, cut, and even sewn. Native Americans were known to use the bark tea for fevers, stomachache, lung ailments, and fever. They also used it in many facets of their everyday lives as a material for canoes, wigwams, scrolls, ritual art, musical instruments, containers for food, and even clothing. Birch bark has been quite valuable since pre-historic times for its applications in building and crafting.

### **Constituents**

Betulinic acid, betulin, methyl salicylate.

### **Parts Used**

Dried, powdered bark.

### **Typical Preparations**

Tea, poultices.

### **Summary**

Antibacterial, antiviral, and anti-inflammatory, birch bark has been used to treat skin outbreaks for centuries. Recent investigations suggest that the chemical betulin found in the bark may be useful in the treatment of melanoma (although not as the sole treatment for the condition). Teas of the bark may also relieve joint pain associated with osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, or gout.

### **Precautions**

Birch is diuretic. Do not take birch bark or leaf internally if you have difficulty going to the bathroom.

## **Birch Leaf**

### **Also known as**

Betula alba and Betula spp.

## Introduction

The birch is a soft-wooded tree native to northerly climates. The leaves have a pleasant odor but a bitter taste. The leaves are wedged shaped and have a pleasant odor but a bitter taste. Birch trees have a strong connection with the celebration of Beltane. This may be due to the fact that birch trees are among the first to come into leaf, and therefore would have made a obvious choice as a representation of spring. Samuel Coleridge called them the "Lady of the woods", but this may have been an existing folk term of the time.

## Constituents

Hyperoside, quercetin.

## Parts Used

Dried leaf.

## Typical Preparations

Tea or tincture. Dr. Jim Duke advises that you can make your own tincture by putting two teaspoons of bark in a cup of vodka and letting it steep for a couple of days.

## Summary

Birch leaf teas relieve bladder and kidney infections by acting as a diuretic, effectively flushing the infectious microorganisms out of the body. For best results, you should also take unsweetened cranberry or blueberry juice.

## Precautions

Don't use birch leaf if you are already taking another diuretic, especially if you are taking Lasix (furosemide).

## Botanical: *Betula alba* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Betulaceae

- [History](#)
- [Constituents](#)
- [Medicinal Action and Uses](#)
- [Dosage](#)
- [Other Species](#)

---**Synonyms**---White Birch. Bouleau. Berke. Bereza. Monoecia triandria. *B. pubescens*. *B. verrucosa*.

---**Parts Used**---The bark and the leaves.

---**Habitat**---Europe, from Sicily to Iceland. Northern Asia.

---

---**History**---The name is a very ancient one, probably derived from the Sanscrit *bhurga*, 'a tree whose bark is used for writing upon.' From its uses in boat-building and roofing it is also connected with the A.S. *beorgan*, 'to protect or shelter.'

Coleridge speaks of it as the 'Lady of the Woods.' It is remarkable for its lightness, grace, and elegance, and after rain it has a fragrant odour.

The young branches are of a rich red brown or orange brown, and the trunks usually white, especially in the second species of *B. alba*, *B. verrucosa*. *B. pubescens* is darker, and has downy instead of warted twigs.

The wood is soft and not very durable, but being cheap, and the tree being able to thrive in any situation and soil, growing all over Europe, is used for many humble purposes, such as bobbins for thread mills, herring-barrel staves, broom handles, and various fancy articles. In country districts the Birch has very many uses, the lighter twigs being employed for thatching and wattles. The twigs are also used in broom making and in the manufacture of cloth. The tree has also been one of the sources from which asphyxiating gases have been manufactured, and its charcoal is much used for gunpowder.

The white epidermis of the bark is separable into thin layers, which may be employed as a substitute for oiled paper and applied to various economical uses. It yields oil of Birch Tar, and the peculiar, well-known odour of russia leather is due to the use of this oil in the process of dressing. It likewise imparts durability to leather, and it is owing to its presence that books bound in russia leather are not liable to become mouldy. The production of Birch Tar oil is a Russian industry of considerable importance. It is also distilled in Holland and Germany, but these oils are appreciably different from the Russian oil. It has the property of keeping away insects and preventing gnatbites when smeared on the hands. It is likewise employed in photography.

When the stem of the tree is wounded, a saccharine juice flows out which is susceptible, with yeast, of vinous fermentation. A beer, wine, spirit and vinegar are prepared from it in some parts of Europe. Birch Wine, concocted from this thin, sugary sap of the tree, collected from incisions made in the trees in March, honey, cloves and lemon peel being added and then the whole fermented with yeast, makes a very pleasant cordial, formerly much appreciated. From 16 to 18 gallons of sap may be drawn from one large tree, and a moderate tapping does no harm.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Constituents---**Birch *bark* only contains about 3 per cent. of tannic acid, but is extensively used for tanning, wherever there are large birch forests, throughout Northern Europe. As it gives a pale colour to the skin, it is used for the preliminary and the final stages of tanning. It contains betulic acid and betulin.

The *leaves* contain betulic acid.

By destructive distillation, the white epidermis of the bark yields an empyreumatic oil, known variously in commerce as oil of Birch Tar, Oleum Rusci, Oleum Betulinum or Dagget. This is a thick, bituminous, brownish-black liquid, with a pungent, balsamic odour. It contains a high percentage of methylsalicylate, and also creosol and guaiacol. The Rectified Oil (*Oleum Rusci Rectificatum*) is sometimes substituted for oil of Cade.

Birch Tar oil is almost identical with Wintergreen oil. It is not completely soluble in 95 per cent. acetic acid, nor in aniline, but Turpentine oil dissolves it completely.

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**Various parts of the tree have been applied to medicinal uses. The *young shoots* and *leaves* secrete a resinous substance having acid properties, which, combined with alkalies, is said to be a tonic laxative. The *leaves* have a peculiar, aromatic, agreeable odour and a bitter taste, and have been employed in the form of infusion (Birch Tea) in gout, rheumatism and dropsy, and recommended as a reliable solvent of stone in the kidneys. With the *bark* they resolve and resist putrefaction. A decoction of them is good for bathing skin eruptions, and is serviceable in dropsy.

The *oil* is astringent, and is mainly employed for its curative effects in skin affections, especially eczema, but is also used for some Internal maladies.

The *inner bark* is bitter and astringent, and has been used in intermittent fevers.

The *vernal sap* is diuretic.

*Moxa* is made from the yellow, fungous excrescences of the wood, which sometimes swell out from the fissures.

**---Dosage---**Of alcoholic extract of the leaves, 25 to 30 grains daily.

#### **---Other Species---**

*B. benta* (Cherry Birch, Black Birch, Sweet Birch, Mahogany Birch, or Mountain Mahogany) is an American variety, with richly marked wood suitable for the use of cabinet and pianoforte makers. The liquor is used in Kamschatka without previous fermentation. The cambium, or the layer between the wood and the bast, is eaten in the spring, cut into strips like vermicelli, and the bark is stimulant, diaphoretic, and astringent, in a warm infusion. In decoction or syrup it forms an excellent tonic for dysentery, and is said to be useful in gravel and female obstructions.

*B. trophylla* is a syn. of *Rhus Aromatica*, or Fragrant Sumach.

*B. papyracea*, or Paper Birch, is largely used for canoe-making in America.

*B. nana*, or Smooth Dwarf Birch, rarely grows above 3 feet in height. The leaves are said to dye a better yellow than the Common Birch; the seeds are a principal food of ptarmigan in Lapland; Moxa is prepared from it and regarded as an effective remedy in all painful diseases.