



Western River Birch

Betula occidentalis

Birch Family (Betulaceae)

Zones: 4-9

Full Sun

Moderate Water

Location: Many locations throughout the Garden

Western River Birch is a small deciduous tree, usually with multiple trunks that can reach 20 to 30 feet in height. It has a rounded crown with spreading and somewhat drooping branches. It is the only Birch native to Utah and is found along moist areas by streams or at the bottom of drainages. Compared to other birches however, the Western River Birch does tolerate some drought.

The ovate shaped, deeply furrowed, deciduous leaves are yellow-green to green in color with toothed edges; the fall color is yellow. It has catkins in the spring that produce broad winged samaras in the fall.

The most striking feature of the Western River Birch is its smooth, shiny, dark red-brown bark with pale horizontal lenticels scars that enlarge as the trunks grow. We have some beautiful specimens on the west end of the Conifer Garden by the stream and in the Visitor Center Parking Lot. They need to be seen to be appreciated.

The Western River Birch is an important riparian tree species and is useful for stream bank stabilization with its fibrous mat forming roots. Many species of birds feed on the seeds and the Western River Birch provides protective cover for a variety of animals. Last, but not least, is the fact that it is not foraged to any great extent by deer and elk, so has great potential for use in our Utah landscapes.