

5 Silver Birch *Betula Pendula*

Silver birch can reach 30m in height but does not usually live beyond 100 years. An impressive tree in all seasons, often called 'The Lady of the Woods' it is easily recognised by the silver bark which has dark cracks as it ages and spreads seeds prolifically.

Did you know?

Birch was one of the first trees to appear after the last ice age and is usually the first tree to colonise bare land.

Value to wildlife.

The light, open canopy provides good conditions for grasses and ground flora such as wood anemone, bluebell and violets. The tree provides food and habitat for 300 species of insect which in turn attract birds and feeding mammals. Blue tits, finches and redpolls feed on the caterpillars and grubs on Birch trees.

Birch woods are good for fungi such as fly agaric (the red ones with white spots) woolly milk cap, chanterelle and birch polypore (razor strop).

Mythology and symbolism.

In Celtic mythology the birch symbolised renewal and purification. Bundles of birch twigs were used to drive out the spirits of the old year.

Uses of Silver birch.

Birch wood is tough and heavy making it suitable for furniture, handles and toys. It was traditionally used to make bobbins and reels for the cotton industry. Traditional garden brooms or Besoms are made from tight bundles of the fine, strong and supple twigs. The bark is used for tanning leather.

