

**BETULACEAE**      **Birch Family**  
Order Fagales

Trees and shrubs with a primarily northern hemisphere distribution. Form a significant element in boreal and temperate forests; often in the early successional stages after fire or other disturbance.

Simple, serrated, stipulate leaves are alternately arranged and often oval or ovate in outline. Reduced, unisexual flowers are arranged in pistillate and staminate catkins which are found on the same plant (all species are monoecious), and often clustered together. There are no nectaries and pollen is dispersed by wind. Flowering is often precocious. Individual flowers may consist of a few small tepals or bracteoles, or a single subtending bract or scale, and either 2 fused inferior carpels or 1-4 stamens. Infructescence in *Alnus* is a small, woody cone-like structure. Fruit is tiny samaras or nutlets which may persist on the 'cone' into winter.

Both *Alnus* and *Betula* are well-defended chemically against herbivory. Alder is an important N-fixer in early successional stages. Frequent hybridization in birch often confounds determination efforts.

New terms: samara, bracteole, infructescence, 'amentiferae'

***Betula*** (birch), ***Alnus*** (alder)

