European White Birch  
(*Betula pendula*)

Alex X. Niemiera, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture

Summary:  
- **Foliage**: Deciduous broadleaf  
- **Height**: 40 to 50 feet  
- **Spread**: 25 to 35 feet  
- **Shape**: Upright  
European white birch is a small/medium fast-growing tree with showy white bark and pendulous branch tips (especially when bearing seed). Small, glossy-green summer foliage turns yellow in fall exposing ornamental white bark. This species is considered to be short lived due its susceptibility to pests.

Plant Needs:  
- **Zone**: 3 to 6  
- **Light**: Partial shade to full sun  
- **Moisture**: Moist  
- **Soil Type**: Sandy, loam, or clay  
- **pH Range**: 3.7 to 6.5

Functions:  
Suggested uses for this plant include shade and specimen plant.

Planting Notes:  
- Transplants readily.  
- Plant in spring.  
- More pH tolerant than River Birch.  
- Prefers moist, well-drained, sandy or loam soil.  
- Plant on the north or east side of a house (within shade pattern) so that trees are less apt to be stressed by high temperatures and dry soil. A cool moist site will most likely decrease the susceptibility to pests and thereby increase the life of this and other white barked birches (see Alternatives).

Care:  
- A regular spray program is necessary to control the bronze birch borer.  
- Prune in summer or fall. Late winter or early spring pruning causes excessive bleeding of sap.

Problems:  
Most white barked birches are susceptible to the bronze birch borer, which can destroy a large tree in one season. They are also susceptible to birch leafminer and Japanese beetles.

Alternatives:  
- Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.  
- **Cultivars of *Betula pendula***:  
  - 'Youngii' is a cultivar with a graceful weeping growth habit.  
  - 'Gracilis' is a pendulous form with a finely cut leaf.  
- *Betula papyrifera* and *B. populifolia* are two northern U.S. natives that also have showy white bark. These species are also prone to pests and are generally considered short lived trees.

Comments:  
The European white birch is a very graceful, relatively short-lived tree grown for its ornamental white bark. White barked birches are usually grown in clumps or "groves" and are especially showy when planted in front of a dark background such as a mass planting of pines or other dark leaved evergreens. Extra care such as irrigation during dry periods and pesticide applications, are necessary to have a long-lived tree.

*This material was developed by Carol Ness as part of the Interactive Design and Development Project funded by the Kellogg Foundation.*