

# SWEET BIRCH

## Betula lenta L.

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Black birch, Cherry birch.

FORM: Usually 50-60 feet high with a diameter 1-3 feet, may reach a height of 80 feet with a diameter of 5 feet; crown in old trees round-topped with long, slender, horizontal or somewhat pendulous branches.

BARK: On old trunks distinctly black, broken into large irregular plates; on young stems and branches, smooth, dark brown, tinged with red.

TWIGS: At first light green and hairy, later reddish-brown, smooth and with wintergreen flavor.

LEAVES: Alternate, simple, oval, heart-shaped at the base, finely toothed on the margin, long-pointed apex, dark green above, pale green below, 2 1/2-6 inches long, 1 1/2-3 inches wide.

FLOWERS: Appear before the leaves; monoecious; staminate formed in the fall, remaining over winter as aments, about 3/4 inch long, in clusters of three which elongate to about 3-4 inches in the spring; pistillate aments are about 1/2-3/4 inch long, slender and pale green.

FRUIT: Cone-like, 1 1/2-2 inches long, composed of 3 lobed scales and small winged nutlets; terminal lobe of scales sharp-pointed.

WINTER BUDS: Alternate, 1/4 inch long, conical, sharp-pointed, shining; bud scales reddish-brown with downy margins; 3 bud scales visible on buds of terminal shoots; 5-8 on spur shoots.

WOOD: With indistinct rays; heavy, strong, hard, dark brown, thin, yellowing sapwood.

USES: Pulp, fuel. Historical uses: furniture, woodwork, wintergreen oil.

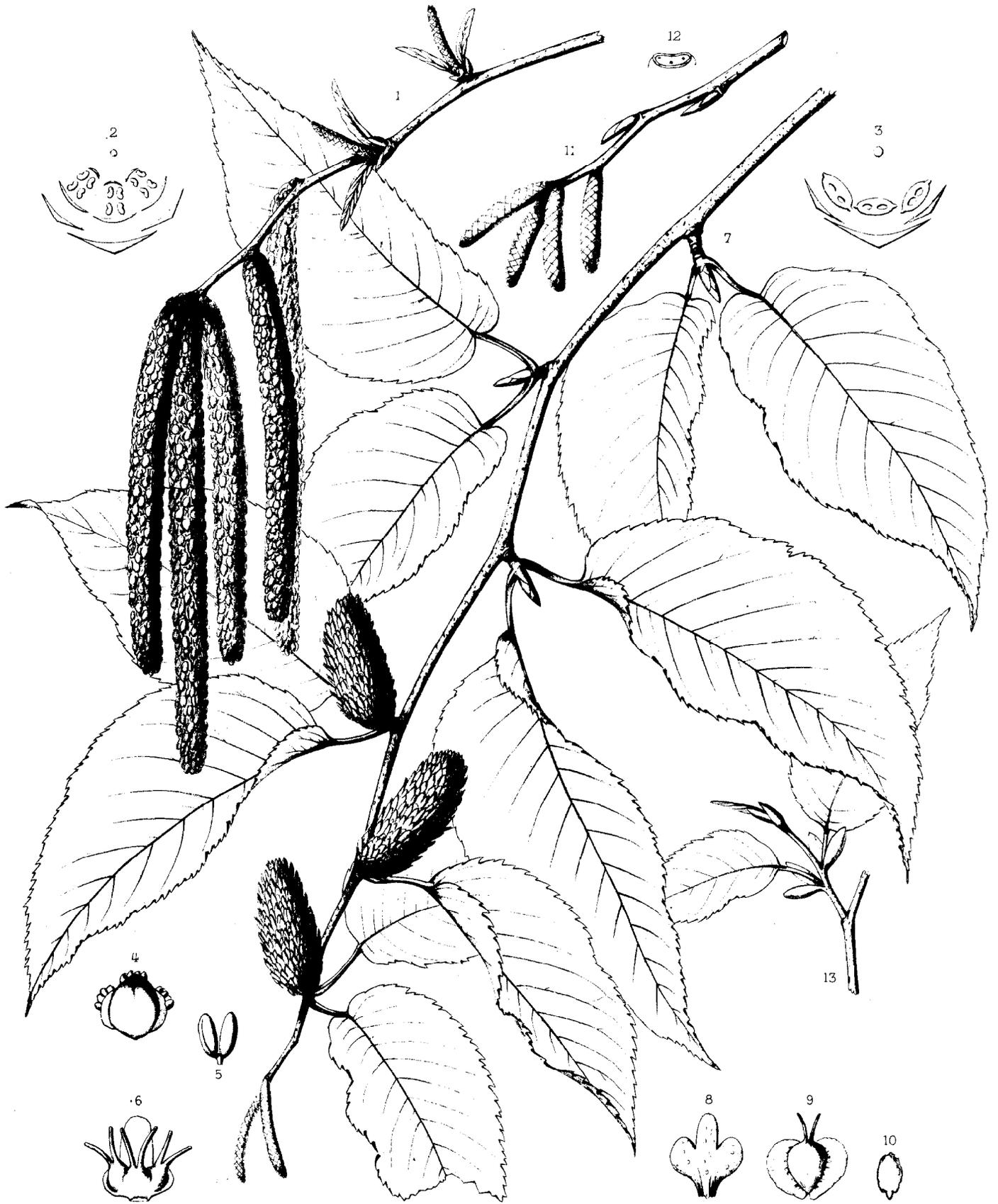
HABITAT: Usually in upland situations on moist or dry gravelly or rocky soils.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS: Close, blackish, cherry-like bark, which does not peel into thin film-like layers; twigs have a distinct wintergreen flavor; scales of the fruit smooth.

DISTRIBUTION IN ALABAMA: Winston, Jackson, St. Clair, Cleburne, Clay, and Talladega Counties.

### EXPLANATION OF PLATE

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| 1. A flowering branch                              | 7. A fruiting branch                        |
| 2. Diagram of a cluster of staminate flowers       | 8. Scale of a strobile                      |
| 3. Diagram of a cluster of pistillate flowers      | 9. A nut                                    |
| 4. Scale of a staminate ament, rear view           | 10. An embryo                               |
| 5. A stamen  | 11. A winter branch with staminate aments   |
| 6. Pistillate flowers with their scale, front view | 12. A leaf scar                             |
|  | 13. A young branchlet with unfolding leaves |



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**Plate 27**