

Alnus rhombifolia: White Alder¹

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Introduction

A North American native commonly found along streams, White Alder is a quick-growing tree (to 30 inches per year) reaching 50 to 75 feet in height, sometimes up to 100 feet, and has a spread of 30 to 40 feet. The deciduous four-inch-long, glossy leaves are dark green above and lighter below and appear just after the springtime display of the six-inch-long, greenish-yellow catkins. These flowers are followed by the appearance of brown, cone-like fruits which persist on the tree throughout most of the year and are quite popular for use in dried flower arrangements. White Alder creates an interesting specimen during the winter with a straight trunk, persistent fruits, attractive silver/grey bark, and slender, horizontal branches with pendulous tips. The crown takes on a pyramidal shape in youth becoming more oval with age. Any necessary pruning should be done in winter or early spring. Once chosen, the central leader dominates the tree forming a pyramidal crown shape.

General Information

Scientific name: *Alnus rhombifolia*

Pronunciation: AL-nus rom-bih-FOLE-ee-uh

Common name(s): White Alder

Family: *Betulaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8A through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: street without sidewalk; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn > 6 ft wide

Availability: not native to North America

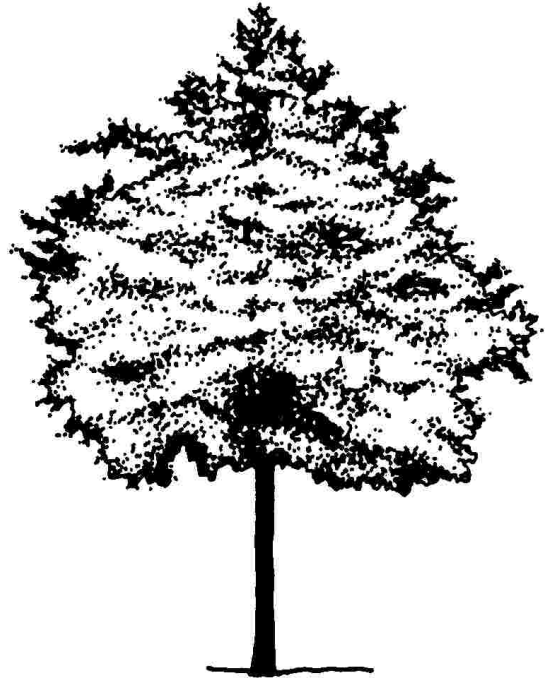


Figure 1. Middle-aged *Alnus rhombifolia*: White Alder

Description

Height: 50 to 75 feet

Spread: 30 to 40 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: pyramidal, oval

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

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Figure 2. Range

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; alkaline; occasionally wet; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

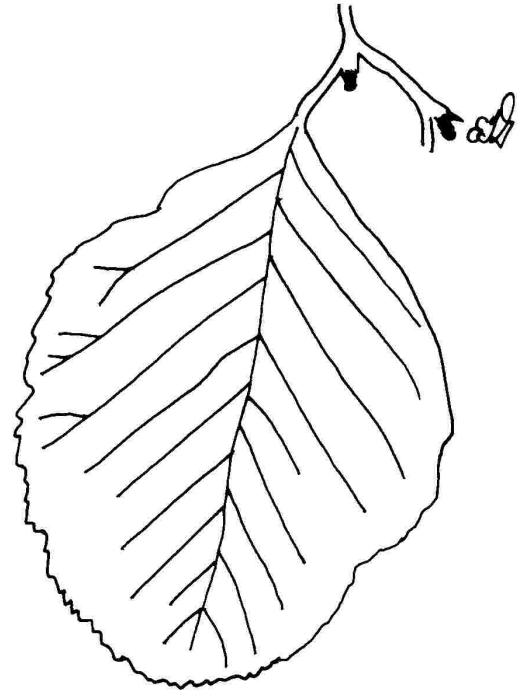


Figure 3. Foliage

Use and Management

White Alder will grow easily in full sun or partial shade in any moist soil and will happily tolerate the wettest conditions. It is usually not grown or offered by nurseries in the eastern U.S. but is common in some areas of California.

Propagation is by fresh seeds or by cuttings.

Pests

White Alder is attacked and killed by the flatheaded borer in California. This borer is closely related to the bronze birch borer. Prune infested branches during late summer and fall when the infestation is visible and easy to detect and the beetle does not fly. Avoid pruning in the spring.

Tent caterpillars.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.