



Township of Bernards Shade Tree Commission

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The HERITAGE River Birch (*Betula nigra* 'Cully')

A notable landscape tree is the HERITAGE river birch (*Betula nigra* 'Cully'). This tree has gained a great deal of popularity and has been planted extensively in residential settings over the last ten years. It can be identified by the peeling tan bark of various shades. Most examples are multi-trunked in clumps of three to five. It is a native tree that grows both in the southern and northern areas of the United States.

The cultivar HERITAGE was found by Earl Cully, a nurseryman from Illinois, who is well recognized for development of various worthwhile landscape trees. He found a birch tree that had exceptional peeling bark flourishing on a residential lawn in a St. Louis suburb more than two decades ago.

River birch grow in moist, but not constantly wet areas, along streams and rivers. Other native birches in this area are the yellow birch which has curly black to gray peeling bark and the gray birch, *Betula populifolia*, which has chalky white non-peeling bark. In colder areas of the Northeast one may note white birch that in time develops peeling bark; these are non-native. The European white weeping birch, *Betula pendula*, is also useful in the landscape; it attains a good height and is strongly weeping. This is common plant to see European landscapes. Birch trees are also native to Asia and some have outstanding white bark and make wonderful specimen trees in colder areas of the Northeast.

More recently a slower growing and weeping form of the river birch, 'Little King' was developed. It grows to only about 10-12 feet high and wide and is densely branched. It is a perfect accent for a niche or accent in a smaller garden.

Birches are susceptible to both leaf miner and the bronze birch borer diseases. In selecting birches for the landscape these diseases need to be considered; some are resistant while others are highly susceptible. Fortunately the river birch and

its cultivars are resistant to these diseases. As a result the HERITAGE birch has become a popular landscape tree.