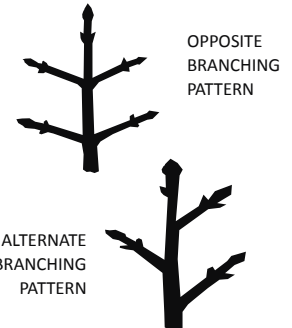


# TREE OF THE MONTH

Black Birch • *Betula lenta*

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS** Black birch has an alternate branching pattern. Young black birch is known for its smooth, shiny bark with characteristic horizontal lenticels (porous tissue that helps trees breathe). As black birches age the bark becomes rougher and tends toward gray-brown. At about 40-50 years of age the bark begins to peel back in square, irregular sections. Black birch leaves are ovate with delicate teeth along the margins. In the autumn the leaves turn a brilliant yellow. The springtime flowers grow in distinctive catkins (long, cylindrical clusters of flowers). Male catkins droop down from the branches and female catkins stand upright, holding themselves aloft to be pollinated by the wind.



**TASTY TREE** The botanical name, *Betula lenta*, refers to this tree's many medicinal and culinary uses. Black birch contains methyl salicylate, the chemical responsible for the wintergreen flavor. Black birch trees were used for centuries to commercially supply wintergreen oil for medicinal and culinary purposes. Native American tribes have long used black birch to treat dysentery, colds, diarrhea, and as a spring tonic. European settlers in North America used wintergreen oil for its medicinal, culinary, and preservative purposes. Unlike yellow birch, *Betula alleghaniensis*, black birch isn't threatened by deer browsing. This is possibly in part due to the strong wintergreen flavor in its twigs and bark.

## WINGED FRUIT

Along with maples and ashes, black birches have winged seeds called *samara*. The delicate wings help the fertilized fruit, which matures in the autumn, spread out beyond the mother tree.



## PIONEERS

Black birch is one of the first species to move into a recently logged area and can form dense thickets.

**DARK WOOD** Black birch wood is not often used for carpentry as it is hard and difficult to work. When it is used, however, the color darkens to a beautiful shade reminiscent of mahogany.



# PITTSFIELD TREE WALKS

identify. learn. know.

**Monday, May 14th | Noon**

Meet outside Hot Harry's on North St.

**Monday, May 21st | Noon**

Meet at the First St. entrance to The Common

**Wednesday, May 30th | Noon**

Meet outside Hot Harry's on North St.

**Spend your lunch hour outside!** Learn how to identify the trees growing all around us in downtown Pittsfield, their natural history, and the importance of urban forestry. **FREE & OPEN TO EVERYONE** so grab a friend and come on down! Walks last approximately 40 minutes with lots of time for questions.

## Benefits of Urban Trees

*Research has linked the presence of urban trees to...*



**REDUCING RATES**  
of cardiac disease, strokes, and  
asthma due to improved air quality



**PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY**  
including habitat for migrating  
birds and pollinators



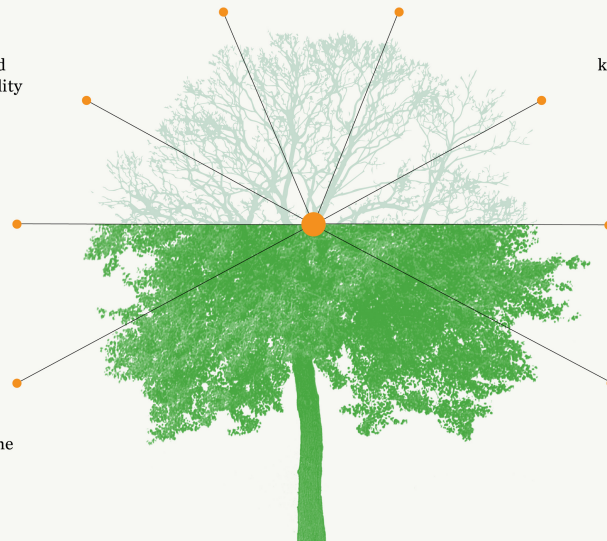
**REDUCING OBESITY LEVELS**  
by increasing physical activity  
including walking and cycling



**MANAGING STORMWATER,**  
keeping pollutants out of waterways,  
and reducing urban flooding



**COOLING** city streets by 2-4° F,  
reducing deaths from heat and  
cutting energy use



**INCREASING**  
neighborhood property values



**FILTERING** up to a third of fine  
particle pollutants within  
300 yards of a tree



**REDUCING STRESS** by helping  
interrupt thought patterns that  
lead to anxiety and depression