



Speckled Alder
Alnus incana

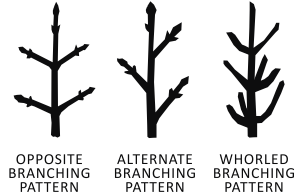


TREE OF THE MONTH

Speckled Alder • *Alnus incana*

ALSO KNOWN AS: GREY ALDER, BLACK ALDER, THIN-LEAFED ALDER, RIVER ALDER

Speckled alder (*Alnus incana*) is an alternate branching shrub or small tree native to much of North America and Europe. They are often found growing in moist habitats, along streams and rivers, and can tolerate floods and a wide variety of soil conditions. Speckled alder is usually categorized as a shrub, growing between six and 12 feet, but they can reach up to 25 feet. They can be confused with their cousin the European black alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) who bears a similar common name, but *Alnus glutinosa* grows between 20 and 50 feet and appears most often as a tree. Unfortunately for tree detectives, speckled alder can hybridize with another cousin, smooth alder (*Alnus serrulata*).



Part of the birch family (*Betulaceae*), speckled alders have both male and female flowers on the same plant. Both types of flowers grow on drooping cylindrical clusters called catkins. Fertilized female catkins become cones that bear small, brown fruits in early fall. Fruits have a winged appendage and are called samaras.

Like all birches, speckled alders' male catkins are longer and more slender than the female.

Speckled alder owes gets this common name from the raised, sometimes warty, whitish bumps on its bark and twigs. These are the plants *lenticles*, raised pores on the bark, that essentially help the tree to breathe.

Native American tribes have long used alders to create textile dyes. Speckled alder wood can produce a red dye while smooth alder can produce a brown dye.

Known as a pioneer species in riparian (river front) areas, speckled alder can form dense stands that stabilize banks and break the wind. Speckled alders help to fix nitrogen in the soil, increasing growth of trees valued for timber like ash that grow nearby.



Tree of the Month is a collaboration between BEAT, the City of Pittsfield, Pittsfield Tree Watch, and the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation's Greening the Gateway Cities Program. Find out more at thebeatnews.org.