



June 7, 2022

Contributed by Lin Moeller

MY LOVE-HATE AFFAIR

Even with all the ecological benefits of trees as written about by many TCGC members, there are times when we each have love-hate affairs with specific trees. Mine is presently with the River Birch, *Betula nigra*, native to the Eastern United States.

When the previous owners built my residence, they planted 4 good-sized river birch trees on the water (windy) side of the house. They are attractive, fast growing, deciduous shade trees, usually with 2 to 3 trunks, exfoliating bark and 2 to 3 inched, oval, tooth-edged leaves. Their height can reach fifty to seventy-five feet.

This description sounds ideal, BUT...my dislike of the river birch is mainly derived from its brittle twigs and branches. After storms with moderate winds, the yard is littered with twigs, sticks, and small branches, from 6 inches to 4 feet or more in length. After over a half hour of raking and picking up its debris, I often look up into the trees and wonder how they can shed so much with each windy storm? (See photo!)



River Birch trees, as their name suggests are content along damp swamp lands, flood plains and river banks where they are great for erosion control with surface roots that slow runoff and thickly webbed matting of smaller roots just below the surface that absorb any standing water. BUT...in a lawn the knobby roots sticking up can dull a lawn mower blade and be a challenge for a gardener wanting to landscape. Finally, if the winds become too gale force or a winter storm bends and ladens the boughs with heavy snow or ice, then my concern would be that a complete stem of the trunk could come down.



Today, cloudless with temperatures in the upper eighties, and the breezes moving the leaves about in a gentle, wispy manner, they seem to be calling out to come, enjoy their loveliness, their beauty.