



## *Alnus rhombifolia* White Alder<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

### 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 (Fig. 1). 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:** 8 through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); residential street tree

**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

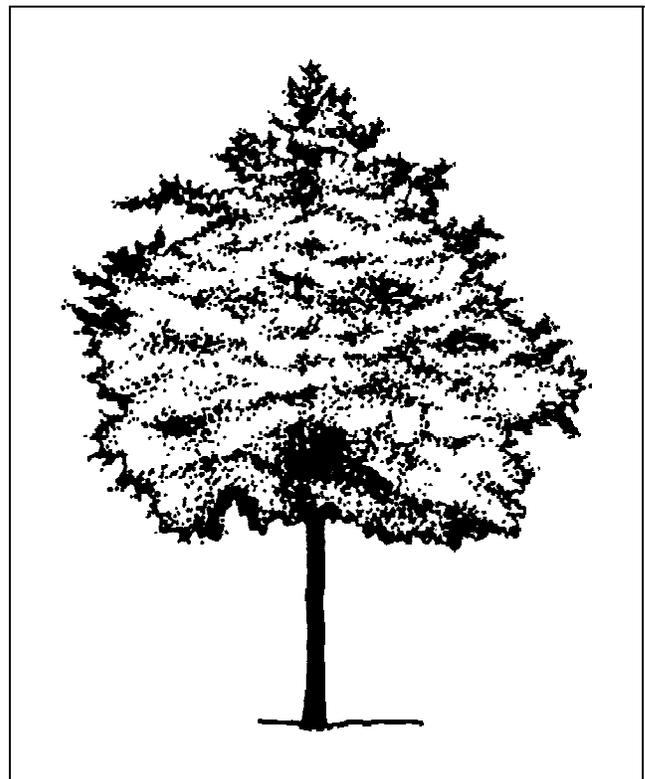


Figure 1. Middle-aged White Alder.

### DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 50 to 75 feet

**Spread:** 30 to 40 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** oval; pyramidal

**Crown density:** moderate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** medium

### 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 fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** yellow

**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

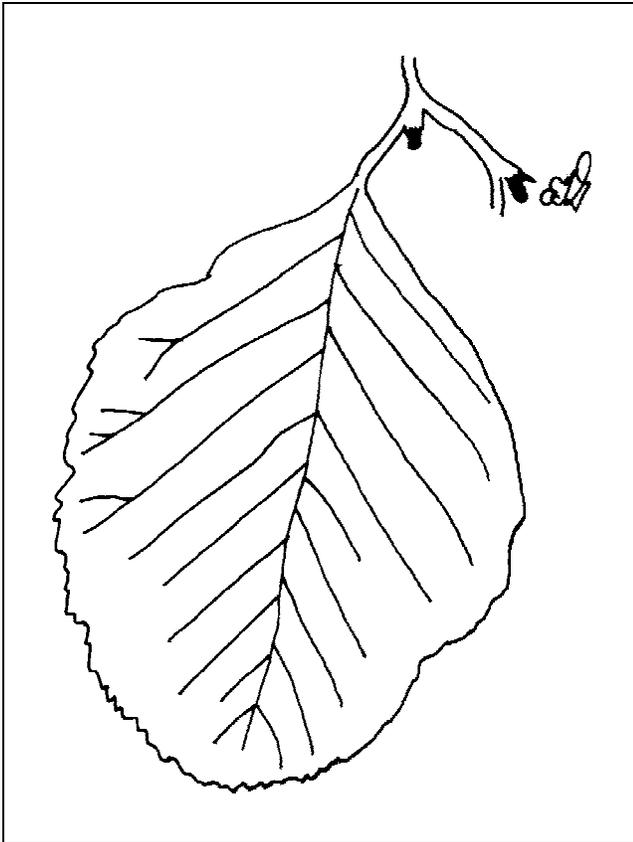


Figure 3. Foliage of White Alder.

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

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** not known to be susceptible

**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

## 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.