

# Wiigwaas Aatik | Tree of Life

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**Through this information and the activities/lessons, it is the hope you will build a sense of community, learn the importance of language, culture and gain some teachings of the land all while building a relationship with Wiigwaas Aatik, Betula Paperifera, or White (paper) Birch.**

To the Anishnabe (Ojibwe) people the White Birch is known as the Tree of Life. It provides mental, spiritual, physical and emotional well being by virtue of the many gifts it gives. The White Birch is found mostly the area known as the Great Boreal Forest (biome) region but inhabits a few southern areas as well. In these areas Indigenous people around the globe used and continue to use the Birch as a resource to sustain life.



## Wiigwaas Mitig | Birch Wood

The wood is dense, but when wet/green it can be easily carved and bent into many items and when it dries becomes very hard and durable. Items such as snowshoes, spoons, spears, sleds, tikanagan parts, snowshovels and other items are made from the wood of the birch.



## Wiigwaas | Birch Bark

The bark of the birch tree is very unique as the grain of the bark runs around the tree whereas most other trees the grain of the bark runs up and down the tree. This trait allows it to be very useful for baskets, bark biting, baby cradles, scrolls, canoes and covering for shelters as it can be harvested in very small or extremely large pieces (as seen in the video). The bark has other unique properties, its many layers allow it to be peeled and used in thinner layers for things like bark biting and in thicker layers for canoes and dwelling coverings.

The bark is very resinous and has many preservative and medicinal properties that have been used in the past and are being researched today.

## Chaaga | Skitagan | Birch Fungus

The black fungus found on the birch was traditionally used to store and start fire. It is also ground up and used to make a traditional medicinal tea.

