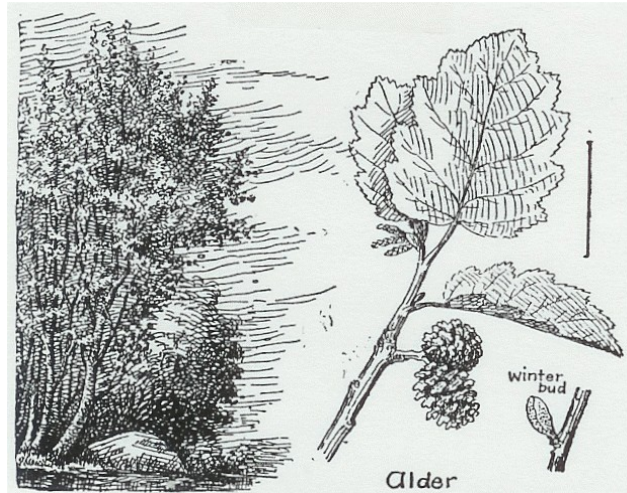


Thinleaf Alder



Thinleaf alder is a common large shrub or small tree, widespread on the banks of streams, in the foothills and in the montane forests to 10,000 feet (3000 m) elevation, and along streams in the southwestern mesa country.

Alder has distinctive woody "cones" that resemble miniature pine cones, about ½ inch (12 mm) long. Typically alder has many stems starting together at ground level. Alder may reach 40 feet (12 m) high, though usually it is about 10 to 15 feet (3 to 5 m) high; the trunk diameter grows to 7 inches (18 cm).

Deer, elk and moose make moderate use of the twigs and leaves for food, as do muskrats, beavers, and cottontail rabbits. Beavers also eat the bark, and use the stems for dam-building. Seeds and buds are a winter food source for many birds. The wood was once preferred by outdoorsmen for firewood. The largest known thinleaf alder grows in Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico; it is 59 feet high with a trunk about a foot in diameter. The scientific name is *Alnus incana ssp. tenuifolia*.

Identifying the Alder

Leaves: 1 to 4 inches (2.5 to 10 cm) long; doubly toothed; to 2.5 inches (6 cm) wide and wrinkled. Leaves alternate but so close together as to appear opposite, and often in clumps of 2 or 3 at end of twigs. Six to nine parallel veins are noticeable. Leaf size is usually about twice water birch leaf size.

Stems twigs soft reddish brown; pith triangular in cross-section. Thicker than birch twigs. Buds reddish on a short stalk, with two scales.

Fruit ¾ inch (18 mm) long woody "cones"; dark brown when mature. These little cones are a sure sign of alder. Some stay on all year. Flowers from April to August. Male catkins and female cones grow on separate plants.

Bark Smooth and thin; usually pale gray. Whitish or gray horizontal ridges or marks on branches (lenticels or breathing pores) do not differ much in color from the bark color, unlike the case in the water birch. The lenticels may form warty bumps on the bark. The bark may have a silvery or grayish cast over brown, or can be pale brown or even dark brown, but not so dark as Water birch bark.

Text Copyright © 1995 - 2010 S. K. Wier. Reproduction reuse or retransmission prohibited without prior written permission from the author. Individuals may print one copy for their personal use.