

TAG ALDER

Alnus serrulata

This common shrub or small tree produces wintertime fruit that look like pine cones. Widely tolerant, it's useful for particularly wet or dry spots in the garden. Also called common, tag or smooth alder.



Description: A shrub or small tree with straight stems and smooth, serrated leaves. Flowers appear in March and April, before the leaves have expanded, and are of a reddish green color. The fruit, which looks like a miniature pine cone, ripen in late fall and persist throughout the winter. They give the plant its common name.

Natural Habitat: Well-known throughout the eastern U.S. Typically found in N.C. growing in clumps and thickets along streams, ditches and wetlands.

Conservation Status: Abundant throughout its range.

Size: 15-20' high.

Growth Rate: Moderate.

Light: Sun to part shade.

Planting and Care: Will tolerate a range of soil types from wet to dry. The roots have nodules on them that are homes to bacteria that take nitrogen from the air. So they can grow in soils that are low in nitrates.

Ornamental Value: Alders are easily identified in winter by the presence of the drooping male catkins and the woody cones, both of which are ornamentally attractive. Winter branches are often added to floral arrangements.

Landscape Usage: A good selection for difficult sites such as moist low spots or dry sites with poor soils. Dense root system slows erosion.

Traditional Uses: Native people and early European settlers used alder inner bark as an analgesic and for smoking fish.

Wildlife Benefits: Planted in groups, the alder provides dense cover and shade for many birds and mammals. Its seeds are important for siskins, chickadees and goldfinches, and beavers eat the bark and use peeled sticks in dams.