

Prunus serotina (Black Cherry) Rose Family (Rosaceae)

Introduction:

Black cherry is not usually cultivated as an ornamental plant, but it seeds itself readily and often escapes into landscapes. It is a valuable forestry plant because the wood is prized for carpentry.

Culture:

Black cherry prefers moist, deep, fertile soils but will tolerate dry or sandy soils. It can be grown in full sun to partial shade and will tolerate both alkaline and acidic soils. It will tolerate drought and salt, but will not tolerate full shade. Black cherry has problems with the eastern tent caterpillar and the cherry scallop shell moth. Cherry leaf spot and black knot are common diseases on black cherry. This tree's messy fruit and weediness can be a drawback in the landscape. This tree is hardy in Zones 3 to 9.

Additional information:

The fruit of black cherry has a bitter-sweet flavor and is used to make jelly and wine. Birds, squirrels, deer, raccoon, black bears, ruffed grouse, opossum and turkey are among the animals that eat the fruit of black cherry. The bark, leaves and twigs of this tree are poisonous to livestock, although deer can eat the leaves without harm. Wilted leaves of black cherry are more poisonous than fresh leaves.

The wood of black cherry is valuable for making furniture and cabinets. The strong, hard wood of this tree is close-grained. It is also used to make paneling, veneers, interior trim, toys and scientific instruments.

In the southern Appalachian Mountains, the bark of black cherry has been used in cough medicines and sedatives. Pioneers in the Appalachians used the fruit of black cherry to flavor rum or brandy.

The national champion black cherry, located in Tennessee in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, is 134 feet tall with a 70-foot spread. The Kentucky state champion is 95 feet tall with an 18-foot spread and is located in Clark County.

This tree was introduced into the landscape in 1629.



Botanical Characteristics:

Native habitat: Ontario to North Dakota, south to Florida and Texas.

Growth habit: Pyramidal when young before becoming oval with maturity. Fast growth rate.

Tree size: Reaches a height of 50 to 60 feet.

Flower and fruit: White flowers are 1/3-inch wide and are borne in 4- to 6-inch-long pendulous racemes in May. Red, 1/3-inch fruits ripen to black in August and September.

Leaf: Leaves are simple, alternate, 2 to 5 inches long and 1 to 1 3/4 inches wide. Leaves are dark green in summer and yellow to red in fall.

Hardiness: Winter hardy to USDA Zone 3.