



Unique Garden Centre



PRAIRIE HARDY SOUR CHERRIES

On the prairies, the cherries that survive here are called bush or sour cherries. Bush cherries are valued for both their landscape characteristics as well as fruit production. Spring flowering is quite spectacular and many people plant cherries for this reason alone. Birds also love the bushes for protection and food. Cherries are used for fresh eating, jams, jellies, wine etc. Some varieties are native to the prairies and are a popular wild berry picking favorite. Cultivated varieties for the prairies are available in varied sizes and fruiting characteristics. Find a bush cherry for you from the varieties listed on the next page.

Prior to Planting

Like most fruiting trees and shrubs, cherries don't like areas with poor drainage. Amend the soil in the area of planting with generous amounts of organic material such as compost and peat moss. Locating on a gentle slope is ideal.

Planting

Dig a hole in the amended area approximately twice the diameter of the pot and about 6 inches deeper. This encourages roots to spread outward. Blend the new soil with the existing to eliminate a sudden soil type change. Check the depth that the plant is within the hole, the soil line within the pot should match the existing soil line once planted. When mulching the area, keep 3-4" of space around the trunk to ensure proper air circulation.

Maintenance

In the spring, prune for shape and broken or damaged branches. Prune annually to prevent shrubs from becoming too dense. They bear their best fruit on young wood, so do not allow any wood older than three years to remain. This keeps the bush size in check for easy picking and reduced winter damage. Remove no more than one-third of the total number of branches at one time. This allows the plant to replace older wood with young, vigorous wood. Fertilize in early spring with a phosphorus fertilizer (one with a higher middle number) and again with a balanced fertilizer, mid June and the beginning of August. Be sure not to fertilize past the middle of August to ensure that the plants will prepare for dormancy properly.

Picking

If you want the fruit for yourself, be sure to pick the berries before the birds get them all. Nanking Cherry ripens in mid July while most other varieties mature towards late summer. Storage time is limited and fruit should be used fairly quickly.



Pests & Diseases



Although several different types of pests feed on cherries, none are considered a major problem. The most common problem insects are aphids, spider mites, apple and cherry maggots, tent caterpillars, cankerworms and occasionally slugs. Inspecting your cherries regularly will spot any problems early. Control aphids, spider mites, tent caterpillars and slugs as soon as you see evidence of their existence. Control for apple and/or cherry maggots begins as soon as petals drop. Check with sales staff for identification of the pest and recommended product for control.

Varieties

Chokecherry

The chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) is a native plant that has become popular as a ornamental. This tree can be used in shelterbelts because it suckers readily and quickly forms a dense hedge row. Chokecherries also provide shelter and food for birds and small animals. The fruit makes excellent jams and syrup. Better yields are achieved if a second chokecherry is present to improve pollination and fruit set. Schubert Chokecherry is often used as a specimen tree because of its deep wine-colored leaves.

Nanking Cherry

The fruit of Nanking cherries (*Prunus tomentosa*) is bright red and sweet. It is excellent for use in jelly and wine making but lacks the size and firmness necessary for canning. Nanking cherries are somewhat self pollinating but production is increased with cross pollination. Nanking works well as a pollinator for early flowering plums such as Brookgold. Mature plants reach heights of up to 2 m and width of 2 to 3 m. Prune annually to prevent shrubs from becoming too dense. Remove no more than one-third of the total number of branches at one time. This allows the plant to replace older wood with young, vigorous wood.

Mongolian cherry

The Mongolian cherry (*Prunus fruitcosa*) is native to Eastern Asia and grows well in Saskatchewan gardens. The medium to dark red fruit is excellent for jelly, wine, syrup and preserves. Better yields are achieved if a second mongolian cherry is present to improve pollination and fruit set. Due to its spreading form and shiny leaves, the plant has great ornamental value. Cultural requirements for the Mongolian cherry are similar to that of the Nanking cherry, with one exception, Mongolians need a larger row spacing because of their suckering habit. Plant them at least 2.5 m apart.



Western Sandcherry

The western sandcherry (*Prunus besseyi*) needs to be cross-pollinated to produce fruit; therefore it should always be planted in pairs. It is a valuable plant for pollinating a wide range of Prunus species including varieties Brookred and Pembina, and in turn the plums will pollinate the sandcherry. Sandcherries are hardy and very productive. Selections are pleasant to eat out of hand, as well as being good for jam and canning.