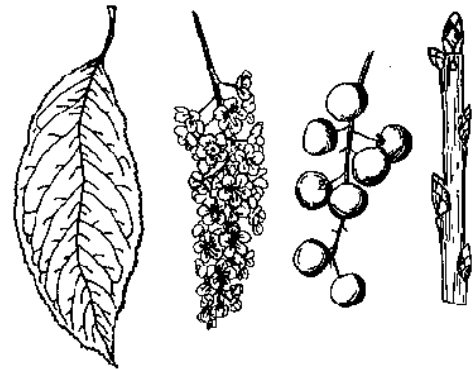


Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

Common Name: Black Cherry (Wild Black Cherry, Rum Cherry and Mountain Black Cherry)

Botanical Name: *Prunus serotina*

Tree Type: Deciduous



Physical Description:

Growth Habit: Black cherry is the largest of the native cherries and the only one of commercial value. It grows on a variety of soils, but makes rapid and best growth on rich, moist land. The leaves are alternate, simple, from 2 to 5 inches long, oval to oblong and lance-shaped. The margins are finely serrated with tufts of hair along the midrib on the undersurface. The bark is smooth with narrow, horizontal lenticels when young. It becomes very dark (nearly black), breaking into small, rough, irregular, upturned plates (like burnt corn flakes) when older. The twigs are slender, smooth, reddish-brown in color with a bitter almond taste, which is characteristic of all cherries.

Height: Black cherry reaches a height of 40-50 feet and has a trunk diameter of 10-20 inches. This species is hardy to Zone 3.

Shape: The black cherry is a medium size tree with a narrow, oval head and pendulous branches.

Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:

The perfect, white flowers of the black cherry are produced in many flowered racemes 4-5 inches long, which appear at the end of May or beginning of June when the leaves are half grown. The single-seeded, pea-sized, juicy fruit is in drooping racemes. It is dark purple or almost black and ripens from June to October. Gravity, animals and birds disperse seeds.

Range within Maine:

Black cherry is widely distributed throughout the state and is one of our most valuable timber trees.

Distinguishing Features:

The young bark of the black cherry has long white pores. The older bark has dark, scaly, circular, saucer-like plates. The undersides of the leaves have a hairy midrib and the fruit appears on short-stemmed clusters.

Interesting Features:

The wood of the black cherry is light, strong, and close-grained with pale reddish-brown heartwood. It is used for furniture and cabinet making, interior finishing, woodenware, tools, fence posts, veneer and plywood.

The bark has medicinal properties. It is stripped from young trees for use in cough medicines, tonics and sedatives. The fruit is used for making jelly and wine. Appalachian pioneers sometimes flavored rum or brandy with the fruit to make a drink called cherry bounce. As a result, the species is also known as rum cherry.

Relationship to Wildlife:

The fruit of black cherry is an important source of food for many birds, squirrel, deer, turkey, mice and moles. The leaves, twigs and bark contain cyanide. During foliage wilting, cyanide is released and domestic livestock that eat wilted foliage may get sick or die. Deer can eat unwilted foliage without harm.

Landscape Use:

Black cherry can be a troublesome pest in the garden because of its weedy, aggressive nature.

Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:

The most important defoliating insects attacking the black cherry include the eastern tent caterpillar and the cherry scallop shell moth. Diseases affecting the species include cherry leaf spot, black knot, and various fungi. Porcupines girdle and kill black cherry trees and also consume the bark. Mice and voles also girdle the stem near the ground.

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