

Prunus serotina: Black Cherry¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

Introduction

Black Cherry is a 60 to 90-foot-tall native North American tree which has an oval silhouette. Low branches normally droop and touch the ground. These are easily removed to create clearance beneath the canopy. The finely-toothed, deciduous leaves are dark green and shiny, changing in fall for a short period to lovely shades of yellow, orange, or red, but this varies with weather conditions and among



Figure 1. Mature *Prunus serotina*: Black Cherry
Credits: Ed Gilman

seedlings. The leaves and twigs contain hydrocyanic acid which could poison livestock or other animals if consumed in large quantities. Wild Cherry cough syrup is made from the reddish-brown, fragrant, and bitter inner bark. The wood is highly prized by wood workers and it has been used since the colonial days for fine furniture.

General Information

Scientific name: *Prunus serotina*

Pronunciation: PROO-nus sair-OTT-ih-nuh

Common name(s): Black Cherry

Family: *Rosaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 3B through 9A (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: weedy native

Uses: reclamation

Availability: not native to North America

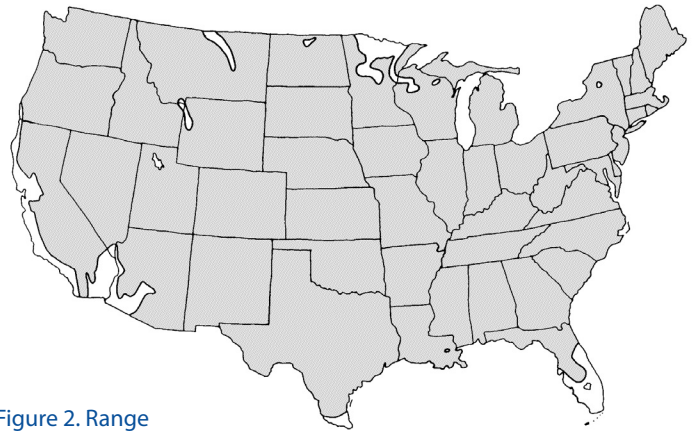


Figure 2. Range

1. This document is ENH-675, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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Description

Height: 60 to 90 feet
Spread: 35 to 50 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: oval
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrulate
Leaf shape: oblong, ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate, bowed
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: showy

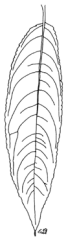


Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: purple
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns
Pruning requirement: little required
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: thin, medium
Wood specific gravity: 0.50

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: sensitive
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

In early spring as the new leaves are unfolding, Black Cherry produces small, white, fragrant blossoms. These are followed by small, bitter fruits which mature during summer and fall from red to dark purple or black. Sometimes used for jams, jellies, or liqueurs, these fruits are highly prized by birds and other wildlife who quickly devour them as they ripen. They stain concrete as they fall in summer, and people can roll on the hard seed. If you plant Black Cherry, it is probably best to locate it away from walks and pavement. The tree appears to be tolerant of drought in its native habitat where roots are allowed to explore a large volume of soil, but growth is often poor in restricted soil spaces characteristic of urban areas.

Black Cherry should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, non-compacted soil in a location where it will not receive excessive heat or competition from grasses. Although somewhat tolerant of dry conditions, Black Cherry will respond best to rich, moist soil and a heavy mulch to keep the root zone cool. Plants should not be disturbed after becoming established and have a fairly shallow root system, making them susceptible to damage from anything stacked, stored, or parked within the dripline and slightly beyond.

Propagation is by seed which is spread by birds and other wildlife.

Pests

Black Cherry is susceptible to eastern tent caterpillar, fall webworm, other chewing insects, but they are usually enough of a problem to warrant control.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern. Black Cherry is a host for Ganoderma root and butt rot.