Prunus caroliniana ‘Monus’: Bright ‘N Tight™ Cherry-Laurel

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Introduction

A dependable, easily grown, North American native, Cherry-Laurel is densely foliated with glossy, dark green, evergreen leaves and can probably reach 40 feet in height with a 25-foot spread, though it is often seen smaller when grown in the open. Cherry-Laurel will create a very dense screen or hedge with regular pruning but is also attractive when allowed to grow naturally into its upright oval, dense form. This cultivar is more compact and denser than the species. Properly trained to a central leader, the plant could make a good small to medium-sized street tree. The tree usually maintains a good central leader and small-diameter, strong lateral branches following one or two proper prunings before the tree is 8 to 10 years old. The species was widely planted in Texas until the severe drought of the early 1950s weakened them. Many of these weakened trees eventually died from borers.

General Information

Scientific name: Prunus caroliniana
Pronunciation: PROO-nus kair-oh-lin-ee-AY-nuh
Common name(s): Bright ‘N Tight™ Cherry-Laurel, Bright ‘N Tight™ Carolina Laurelcherry
Family: Rosaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 8A through 10A (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Invasive potential: weedy native

Uses: urban tolerant; street without sidewalk; deck or patio; screen; hedge; container or planter; reclamation; trained as a standard; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median

Figure 1. Middle-aged Prunus caroliniana ‘Monus’: Bright ‘N Tight™ Cherry-Laurel
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

Description
Height: 25 to 35 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: oval, round
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire, serrulate
Leaf shape: oblong, lanceolate, elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen, evergreen, fragrant
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

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

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: black
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; not 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
Wood specific gravity: unknown

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

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

Use and Management
In springtime, tiny, creamy-white showy flowers appear in dense, fragrant clusters and are followed by small, shiny,
black cherries, which are quite attractive to wildlife. The flowers attract lots of bees. The great quantity of fruit may create a litter problem if the trees are located near a patio or walkway but the fruit is small and washes away quickly. The quick growth and ease of maintenance makes Cherry-Laurel ideal for naturalizing and for low maintenance gardens except that hundreds of seedlings can be found beneath the crown each year from germinating seeds. Of course, this would not be a problem in a street tree planting or in an area such as a lawn or highway median which is mowed regularly. Though the crushed leaves and green twigs of Cherry-Laurel give off a delicious maraschino cherry fragrance, they are quite bitter and possibly poisonous. Root systems are often quite shallow but usually they are not aggressive and do not cause problems.

Preferring ample moisture while young, Cherry-Laurel is otherwise well-suited to sun or shade locations on any average, well-drained soil. Once established, it is salt- and drought-tolerant, requiring little or no irrigation. Over-irrigating can cause chlorosis and decline. Do not plant in wet, soggy areas. The tree adapts well to soils with high pH. Clay soil is fine as long as water doesn't stand after it rains.

The cultivar ‘Compacta’ has a very dense, compact habit of growth, to about 20 feet tall.

Propagation is by cuttings.

**Pests**

This tree's pests include mites, borers, and caterpillars. Borers are troublesome on stressed trees.

**Diseases**

Leaf spot, fire-blight, and stem canker are diseases of this tree. It is difficult to grow in containers due to root rot and over-irrigation.