



Prunus serotina Black Cherry¹

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INTRODUCTION

Black Cherry is a 60 to 90-foot-tall native North American tree which has an oval silhouette (Fig. 1). 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 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

Uses: reclamation plant; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

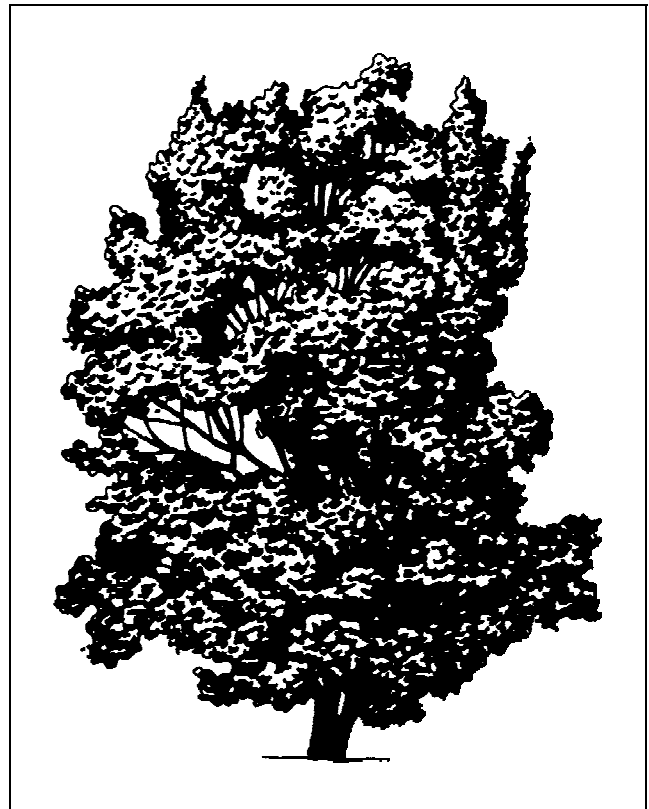


Figure 1. Mature Black Cherry.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 60 to 90 feet

Spread: 35 to 50 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: oval

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

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

Flower

- Flower color:** white
- Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** round
- Fruit length:** < .5 inch
- Fruit covering:** fleshy
- Fruit color:** purple

- Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

Trunk and Branches

- Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
- Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
- Breakage:** resistant
- Current year twig color:** brown
- Current year twig thickness:** medium; thin
- Wood specific gravity:** 0.50

Culture

- Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
- Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; occasionally wet; alkaline; well-drained
- Drought tolerance:** high
- Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate
- Soil salt tolerance:** good

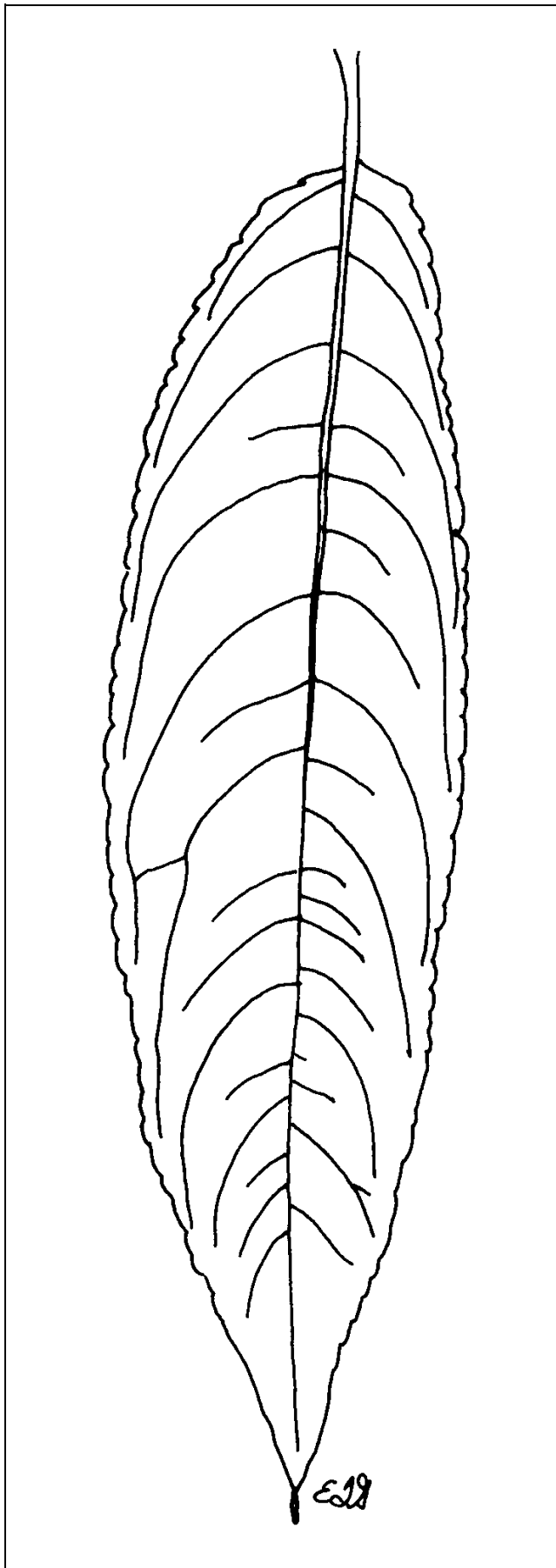


Figure 3. Foliage of Black Cherry.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: seeds itself into the landscape

Ozone sensitivity: sensitive or moderately tolerant

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

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.