

# Black Cherry

*Prunus serotina*

Rum Cherry

Black Cherry is a 60-90 foot tall native North American tree that has an oval silhouette. The wood is strong, hard, close grained with a rich reddish-brown color that is highly prized for cabinetry and furniture. The finely toothed leaves change in the fall to lovely shades of yellow, orange, and occasionally red. The leaves and twigs contain hydrocyanic acid which can poison livestock, but deer browse seedlings and leaves without harm. Black Cherry was one of the first "new world" trees imported to Europe with a specimen noted in an English garden in 1629. Pitted fruits are edible and are eaten raw as well as used in jellies and for making wine and flavoring rum and brandy. The fruits are an important food for numerous species of birds, fox, bear, raccoon, squirrels, and rabbits.



## Identification

### Leaves

Alternate, 2-5 inches long, oval to oblong, lance shaped. Margins are finely serrated, dark green above and paler below, commonly with reddish hairs on midrib.



### Bark/Wood

Bark is thin and easily damaged, gray and smooth with horizontal lenticels when young; rough like burnt corn flakes at maturity.



### Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; perfect white racemes appear when leaves are half to newly formed in spring. Fruit dark purple to black when ripe, less than half inch diameter.



### Form

Medium sized tree that develops a long, straight, clear bole. Overall form is generally quite narrow, especially with competition. Shallow rooted.



## Uses

Black Cherry wood is among the most valued of cabinet and furniture woods in North America. It is also used in handles, toys, crafts, scientific instruments, and veneers. The fruit continues to flavor rums, brandies, and wines.

## Ethnobotany

Inner bark historically used as cough remedy, tonic, and sedative. The fruit has been used for fresh eating, jellies, making wine, and flavoring rums and brandies.

## Native Distribution

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick west to Ontario and Michigan, south to the Gulf states.

## Establishment

Black Cherry especially susceptible to mechanical damage to bark.

## Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 90'Hx50'Wx2'dbh  
 USDA Zone 3-9  
 Light Requirements Partial Shade/Full Sun

Soils Diverse, Acid  
 Drought Tolerant? Moderate  
 Inundation Tolerant? Moderate

## Pests/Damaging Agents

Wildlife frequently girdles young trees, or provide entry points for fungi. Miners and beetles bore into the bark, reducing wood quality. Leaf diseases common but not fatal. Susceptible to fire.

## Similar Species

## Propagation

Seed - period of dormancy. Seeds remain viable for up to three years.

## Source(s)

Seed collected from Orion Farms, Philadelphia, NY.