

Chokecherry



- Growth Form: ovoid to irregular
- Crown Density: moderate
- Size: 6-20 feet high
- 6-20 foot spread
- Drought Resistance: good
- Cold Hardiness: excellent
- Growth Rate: rapid
- Life Span: moderate
- Elevational Range: to 9,000 feet
- Soil Conditions: good alkaline tolerance
- Possible Insect Problems: borers, pear-slug sawfly
- Possible Disease Problems: black knot, fireblight
- Wildlife Value: high: song and ground birds; good: small mammals, and browse for deer
- Seasonal Color: golden yellow to orange fall foliage
- Miscellany: delicious edible fruit for jellies and pies; native; can be poisonous to livestock

Canada Red Chokecherry

Prunus virginiana 'Canada Red'



ZONE: 2-8
HEIGHT: 20-30'
SPREAD: 15-20'

SHAPE: Round, Arching Branches, Dense
EXPOSURE: Full Sun, Partial Sun
GROWTH RATE: Moderate

SOILS: Prefers well drained sites over heavy wet soils. Tolerates extreme cold, heat, wind, poor soil, and fluctuating temperatures. Once established, can tolerate drought. Low water needs.

DESCRIPTION:

- Canada Red Chokecherry is the red-leaf variety of the American chokecherry. It is a very hardy ornamental tree distinguished by its foliage which is green in the spring and on its new growth through the summer while older leaves turn to dark purple in summer and

red in the fall. Fragrant white flowers in spring are followed by sweet purplish fruit in summer. It can be grown as a pyramidal tree that grows 20-30' tall or as a shrub. (See photos above.) It is equally at home on open prairies, ranches, commercial developments, and residential neighborhoods.

WILDLIFE VALUE:

- Bird lovers will enjoy the wide variety of birds that seek out their fruit. The fallen fruit is also a draw for rabbits, rodents, and bear. Deer use them as a browse source in winter. Spring flowers draw plenty of honeybees and butterflies.

HISTORY / LORE / USE:

- First cultivated in U.S. as an orchard tree in 1724. Since then it has been used to make jams, jellies, syrups, & wines. Also green and purple dyes. Warning: the bark, leaves, stems, and seed pits are toxic to people and livestock. The fleshy pulp of the fruit is not toxic. It should be cooked to break down the formation of prussic acids in the pits.

MOISTURE:

- Moderate moisture is helpful till their root systems are well-established. Beyond that, they are very drought-tolerant.

LEAVES:

- Leaves are 2-5 inches long, alternate, simple, and oblong to nearly oval with finely serrated margins. Green in spring & on new growth. Purple as leaves age in summer. Bright red or orange in autumn.

FLOWER COLOR:

- Small white flowers hanging in clusters 3-5" long

BLOOM TIME:

May-June

FRUIT DESCRIPTION:

- Fruit is a dark red, turning to purple drupe, 1/3" in diameter that matures July through October. Very attractive to wildlife. People should NOT eat the berries raw but they can be processed into jams, jellies, syrups, and wine.

Source for this information: www.arborday.com, WSU Clark County Extension PNW Plants, & USDA Chokecherry Plant Guide

CHOKECHERRY

Prunus virginiana L.

Plant Symbol = PRVI

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Pullman, Washington and Manhattan, Kansas Plant Materials Centers and Kansas State University Forestry Division



©J.S Peterson @ PLANTS

PARTS OF THIS PLANT CAN BE POISONOUS-See Environmental Concerns section of this document

Alternate Names

common chokecherry, choke cherry, black chokecherry, red chokecherry, California chokecherry, Virginia chokecherry, eastern chokecherry, western chokecherry, rum chokecherry, whiskey chokecherry, wild cherry, wild blackcherry, bird cherry, jamcherry, chokeberry, cabinet cherry, chuckleyplum, sloe tree, bitter-berry, caupulin.

Uses

Many people do not realize cherry and some other very important commercial fruit trees (apple, peach, plum, apricot, nectarines, and almonds) are in the rose family. Anthropologists indicate cherries have been harvested in Eurasia from 4,000 to 5,000 B.C. In 1629, chokecherry was imported to England where it has been cultivated as an ornamental. It was first cultivated in North America as an orchard crop in 1724.

The seeds are toxic due to production of hydrocyanic acid in the leaves, stems and seeds. The almond nuts are treated to deactivate the poisonous glycosides before they

are put on the market. Cases of illness and deaths have been traced back to eating the seeds of these trees.

Conservation: Chokecherry is used extensively in shelterbelts, windbreaks, wildlife habitat and mass plantings for erosion control. Chokecherry does well in riparian area planting. It provides thermal cover over the water and works well in stabilizing streambanks. It has been used on disturbed sites such as mined land reclamation, highway right-of-ways and construction sites. It is a good erosion control plant because it can form thickets and spread by rhizomes.

Wildlife: Chokecherry is important to many wildlife animals. Birds, rabbits, hares, rodents and bears all seek out and eat its fruit. It provides food, cover and nesting habitat for a variety of birds. Birds will also take advantage of its growth form for cover and nesting habitat. It is used extensively by deer as a browse source in the winter. The early spring flowers provide an important source of nectar for butterflies, honeybees and ants.

Food: The common name, chokecherry, came from the bitter and astringent taste of the fruit. The fruit was a staple for numerous Indian tribes across the North American continent, especially to tribes who lived on the plains and prairies. Chokecherries were routinely cooked before they were eaten or dried thoroughly. Both methods served to break down any formation of prussic acid contained in the stone pits. Drying chokecherries improves their taste by sweetening them, or at the very least, getting rid of the naturally occurring bitter taste. Chokecherries were consumed in three ways by Indians. The fruit and/or juice were eaten. Whole cherries, including pulp, skin and stone, were pulverized into a pulp, shaped into balls and dried in the sun. Fruit balls could be stored for future use. Either boiling or drying the fruit will neutralize the naturally occurring hydrocyanic acid. The most important use was as part of the recipe for pemmican, or mince-meat. Pemmican was made by getting a slice of dried meat (bison was preferred over elk, deer or antelope) and pounding it with a stone until it had a fine texture. Bone marrow and animal lard were then heated and mixed with the meat. Crushed chokecherries were then added. Pemmican would be cached as a winter food. Some form of pemmican was a mainstay for all plains tribes. Chokecherry butter was made by cooking the mature fruit, straining out the seed and skins, mixing this poultice with an equal quantity of wild plums or crabapples and adding sugar. The bark was brewed for a tea drink. Many tribes would add the fruits to soups and stews as flavoring and as a thickening agent. A green branch was speared through a meat slab while it was cooking to add spice to the taste.

Likewise, pioneers and settlers came to realize its food value. Mature fruits are still collected today and used to make jellies, jams, pie-fillings, syrups, sauces and wines.

Like many plants and animals which were vital to their survival some tribes used parts of the chokecherry plant in their rituals. A green dye was derived from the leaves, inner bark and immature fruit. A purplish-red dye was derived from the ripe fruit. The Cheyenne used the limbs to make arrow shafts and bows. The Crows used it for tipi stakes and pins. Mountain men washed their steel traps in water boiled with the bark to remove the scent. It is speculated many tribes planted seeds in places they frequented to ensure a supply of chokecherries was always available.

Chokecherry is being promoted for planting as a minor crop in the prairie provinces of Canada for juice production. Estimated fruit production potential is 15,000 pounds per acre from mature plants. There is a significant research effort in Canada for developing fruit producing cultivars.

Landscaping: In some parts of the U.S., chokecherry is a popular ornamental. Its quick growth, mature size, attractive white flowers in the spring and strong, sweet and almond-like aroma fragrance make it a good yard tree in urban neighborhoods. Cultivars are planted for ornamentals rather than the native species. All native chokecherry varieties have a great tendency to sucker, which can create problems in lawn care. Most cultivated varieties do not have this suckering trait while producing more attractive flowers and/or larger fruit. The fruit also attracts a diverse population of birds for a number of weeks. Chokecherries can be a component in a screen or noise barrier planting.

Ethnobotany: Chokecherry covered a large geographic range in North America, so a majority of tribes used it to treat a variety of health problems. It was valued especially for its astringent properties and beneficial effect upon the respiratory system.

The Arikara women would drink the berry juice to stop post-partum hemorrhage.

The Blackfeet drank berry juice for diarrhea and sore throats. An infusion of the cambium layer mixed with Saskatoon serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) was taken as a general purge treatment and to lactating mothers so they could pass on the medicinal qualities to the nursing baby. They also used it in an enema solution for their children. Willow (*Salix* spp.) tea was used to counteract the laxative effect of chokecherry.

The Cherokees used chokecherry in the following ways: mixed chokecherry with hazel alder (*Alnus serrulata*), downy rattlesnake plantain (*Goodyera pubescens*), Canadian wildginger (*Asarum canadense*) and yellowroot

(*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*) to make a blood tonic. An infusion made from boiled bark was given for coughs, laryngitis, chills, ague, fevers and to loosen phlegm. Warm chokecherry tea was given to women when labor pains began. The root bark is a good astringent and was mixed with water and used as a rinse for open sores and old skin ulcers. The tree bark of spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) and flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) was added to corn whiskey and used to treat for measles. The fruit was boiled and eaten to treat for bloody bowels. The branches and leaves were one of six ingredients burned in sweat lodges to treat for indigestion and jaundice.

The Cheyenne would gather the immature fruit, dry it in the sun, pulverize it and use it as a treatment for diarrhea.

The Paiutes made a medicinal tea from the leaves and twigs to treat colds and rheumatism.

The Sioux chewed the dried roots and then placed this poultice in open wounds to stop the bleeding. The Sioux, Crows, Gros Ventres and others made a bark tea to cure stomach aches, diarrhea and dysentery. The Crows also used the bark to cleanse sores and burns.

In the 19th century medical doctors used many concoctions of chokecherry leaves and bark to treat a number of ailments. Chokecherry bark was listed in the *U.S. Pharmacopoeia* from 1820 to 1970. It is still listed as a pharmaceutical aid, a flavor agent for liquid medicines. Among the health complaints treated were debility, hectic fever, irritative dyspepsia, irritability of the nervous system, fever, pleurisy, whooping cough, tuberculosis, pneumonia, sore throats and gastrointestinal problems. It was recommended as a rinse on burns, open sores, cankers and skin ulcers. Pharmaceutical books at that time cautioned against boiling any mixture using chokecherry leaves or bark because it would drive off the medicinal properties. The bark was used as a flavoring agent in many cough syrups. In 1834, Dr. Proctor first identified the bark as containing prussic acid.

In their journals, Lewis and Clark recorded that while camped on the upper Missouri River Captain Lewis became ill with abdominal cramps and fever. He made a tea from chokecherry twigs and was well the next day.

Modern medicinal research shows in small dosages hydrocyanic acid can stimulate respiration, improve digestion and gives a false sense of well-being. Some cancer research involving hydrocyanic acid is being conducted.



© Nevada Native Plant Society
Margaret Williams, Nevada Native Plant Society, @ PLANTS

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Weediness

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace more desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site.

Description

General: Rose Family (Rosaceae). Chokecherry is a native, perennial, deciduous, woody, thicket-forming large erect shrub or small tree. It rarely reaches a height of over 30 feet. The crown is irregular and from 10 to 20 feet wide when mature. The stems are numerous and slender. Reproduction can either be by seed or root rhizomes.

Leaves are dark green and glossy above and paler beneath. They are alternate, simple, glabrous, and oval to broadly elliptic in shape, 1 to 4 inches long, and 3/4 to 2 inches wide. The margins are toothed with closely-spaced sharp teeth pointing outward forming a serrated edge. They turn yellow in autumn.

The bark of young trees may vary from gray to a reddish brown. As it ages the bark turns darker, into brownish-black and becomes noticeably furrowed. The bark is distinctly marked by horizontal rows of raised air pores (lenticels). With maturation the lenticels develop into shallow grooves.

It has perfect flowers which are aromatic and arranged in cylindrical racemes 3 to 6 inches long. The racemes always grow on the current year's leafy twig growth. Individual flowers are perfect, 1/4 to 3/8 inch in diameter with 5 white petals. The flowers start appearing before

the leaves are fully developed. Flowers may appear from April to July and fruits form a couple of months later.

The fruits are spherical drupes (fleshy fruit with a stone in the center), globose, 1/4 to 3/8 inch in diameter. Small ripe cherries range in color from dark red or purple to almost black. There are from 3,000 to 5,000 seeds per pound.

The roots are a network of rhizomes. Deep root systems grow at irregular intervals along the length of the rhizomes. Rhizomes can extend beyond the drip zone, up to 35 feet away from the base of the tree. Rhizomes grow up to 3/4 inch in diameter.

There are three recognized varieties of *Prunus virginiana*. The variety *demissa* is commonly called western chokecherry. It produces dark red fruit. The variety *melanocarpa* produces black fruit. The variety *virginiana* produces crimson to deep red fruit. This variety can be found in two forms, one with red and one with white fruit.

Habitat: Chokecherry is found in a large geographic area and it grows abundantly in many habitat types and plant associations. It may be found in thin stands, as dense thickets or individually in open forest clearings. It prefers direct sunlight and is not an understory species of boreal forests.

Chokecherry occurs naturally in a wide range of soil types and textures. Soils supporting chokecherry vary considerably, from abandoned construction sites, with almost no soil depth or fertility, to deep virgin grasslands, with deep profiles and a high level of nutrients. Soil textures range from silt to sandy loam, it does not do well on heavy clay soils. Soil pH can vary from 5.2 (mildly acid) to 8.4 (moderately alkaline) without any adverse effect upon growth. Precipitation ranges from 13 to 65 inches annually. Sites range from low to mostly mid-elevation, although it also occurs from 8,000 to 10,000 feet in Idaho, Nevada and Utah. It is widely adaptable to temperature extremes. It is found in USDA hardiness zones 2 to 7 naturally. If planted, chokecherry will grow into zone 10. The four major limiting factors in its habitat are that it is intolerant of shade, poor drainage, frequent flooding and soils with a large amount of clay.

Many wildlife animals eat the fruit and distribute it. Birds are by far the most common carrier of the seeds. As a consequence it grows abundantly on places where birds rest, like along roadsides, fences, hedgerows, riparian margins and forest clearings.

Chokecherry is well adapted to fire disturbance. It can be top-killed by fire, but re-sprouts readily from root crowns and rhizomes. Seed germination is apparently improved with heat treatment, suggesting a further adaptation to fire.

Known Distribution

Distribution: Chokecherry is found in all but eight states or territories. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Establishment

Nursery grown seedlings establish satisfactorily if planted free of competition in areas having 15 or more inches of annual precipitation. If seeds are planted in the spring they should be pre-chilled for 3 months, then placed about 1/2 inch deep. Saplings are not tolerant of weedy competition for 2 to 3 years after planting. Use of weed barrier mat, a strict cultivation regime, or proper herbicide treatment is necessary if a successful planting is to occur. Check with your local NRCS Field Office to determine if chokecherry is adapted to your area or soils before planting any trees.

Management

Management of chokecherry will be dependent on whether it is looked upon as a desirable or undesirable plant. On range and pastures it is often considered a potential hazard to livestock. As a consequence either mechanical and/or herbicide treatments combined with good grassland management is needed to prevent animal loss. When it is used in windbreaks, as an ornamental plant or as a wildlife resource it is beneficial. Control of weedy vegetation, and treatment for potential diseases, is necessary if it is expected to grow for an extended period of years

Pests and Potential Problems

Chokecherry is susceptible to X-disease, black knot, stem decay, shothole, Valsa canker, and honey fungus *Plowrightia stansburiana*. Common insect pests are the prairie tent caterpillar, eastern tent caterpillar and aphids. In the northeastern United States, chokecherry is a primary host of the eastern tent caterpillar. Browsing by deer on young immature trees causes considerable damage in some areas.

Environmental Concerns

The leaves, bark, stem, and stone (seed pit) of chokecherry are all toxic. It is potentially poisonous to all classes of livestock, but cattle and sheep are the ones commonly affected. The meaty flesh of the fruit is not toxic.

Hydrocyanic acid (HCN) is often called Prussic acid. HCN does not occur freely as a plant compound. It is formed only after disruption of the plant cell, either by mechanical injury or a sudden freeze. Only then do the degradative enzymes (hydroxynitrile lyases) and glycoside come into contact and mix together. HCN acid occurs in greatest amounts in the leaves. Generally, the amount of HCN in the leaves lessens as the growing season progresses. By autumn chokecherry leaves have so little glycoside, a component of HCN, they are not

normally considered hazardous. Drought stress may cause the leaves to concentrate the glycoside in heavier amounts than usual. Wilted leaves are more toxic per unit weight due to dehydration, which concentrates the components, which make up HCN. HCN is so toxic at low levels because it inhibits blood cells from absorbing oxygen. One symptom of HCN poisoning is the blood turns bright red when exposed to the air and it clots abnormally slow.

Cyanogenic glycosides (prunasin, produced in the leaves and twigs, and amygdalin, produced in the stone) are the building blocks for HCN. Of the two, prunasin is found in a much larger quantity. HCN is most commonly formed in the plant due to mechanical injury (such as browsing), a sudden change in temperature (an early and heavy frost) or in the animal during digestion. The glycosides can either be hydrolyzed by enzymes in the plants or by rumen microorganisms. The glycosides occur in vacuoles in plant tissue while the enzymes are found in the cytosol.

Ingestion of about 0.25 percent of an animal's body weight, or 50 milligrams/kilogram of body weight, is the Lethal Dose of fifty percent of animals (LD50). This means less than 4 ounces of fresh leaves can be toxic to a 100 pound animal.

Poisoning generally occurs when animals graze this amount or more in an hour or less. Formation of HCN must occur primarily within the short time between the mastication of the forage and its arrival in the stomach, for the acidic contents of the stomach slows down the reaction of the chemical process which creates the HCN. The toxic elements become even more active if the animal drinks water immediately after browsing. HCN works so quickly by the time poisoning symptoms are identified it is generally too late to treat. Injection of a combination of sodium thiosulfate and sodium nitrite in the veins or peritoneum is the recommended antidote. Oxidizing substances such as potassium permanganate or hydrogen peroxide given as a drench may help some. Any other medications promoting respiratory help and nerve stimulants may also contribute to recovery. For any treatment to be effective it must be given immediately upon symptoms of poisoning.

Removing livestock from the HCN source is the only practical way to prevent mass poisoning and numerous losses once it has been detected. Good livestock management includes keeping hungry livestock away from areas where chokecherry is abundant. Maintaining a good level of preferred forage in pastures will do a great deal in preventing HCN poisoning.

When a person eats a single apple seed or cherry pit, though not recommended, it is unlikely to cause discomfort or serious illness. However, there have been reported deaths, usually of children chewing on the stems

and leaves, or swallowing the stones. Visible reactions to poisoning may include; anxiety; uneasiness; confusion; dizziness; vertigo; headache; nausea; vomiting; the lips turn blue; bloating; dilation of the eyes; muscular weakness; abnormal breathing, either very labored or very rapid; paralysis of the throat; irregular heart beat; convulsions; coma ensues and finally death. Clinically, death results from the general anoxic state created by the inhibition of cytochrome oxidase.

Seeds and Plant Production

Chokecherry can be propagated by seed, rhizome cuttings, suckers, crown division, semi-hardwood cuttings and grafting. Generally, seed crops are regular and viable. The flowers are more abundant and more fruit is produced on plants growing on open sites or in forest clearings. Natural dispersal of the seed occurs when it passes through the digestive tracts of mammals and birds. The seeds may be carried a long distance from the parent plant in this manner. If the rhizomatous roots are damaged due to a mechanical injury suckers will be produced. This is often how thickets are formed. A fire initially causes major damage to a stand of chokecherry. However, regrowth is enhanced for several years following a burn. It sprouts vigorously from surviving root crowns and suckers arise from the rhizomes. Chokecherry has seed dormancy. About half of the seed which is not stratified germinates within a couple of months. Delayed germination may occur up to 4 months. An after-ripening period in the presence of oxygen and moisture is needed for a majority of seed to germinate. Good germination can only be expected after a cool, moist stratification regime lasting 90 to 160 days at 36 to 41 degrees Fahrenheit. Sow 25 seeds per foot of drill row. One-year-old bareroot stock should be planted on deep, well-drained soils in sunny locations.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Planting materials can be obtained from most commercial hardwood nurseries and seed sources. Several cultivars have been released by government agencies and private nurseries for use in landscaping and/or fruit production. The two most commonly marketed cultivars are 'Schubert', and 'Canada Red'. A lot of literature states that these two cultivars are the same one with just different names. This is not the entire truth. 'Schubert' is one of the oldest cultivars. Its parent rootstock is *Prunus virginiana melanocarpa* selected from a native stand near Valley City, North Dakota. It was released by the Oscar Will Nursery which was located in Bismarck. 'Canada Red' was created by grafting 'Schubert' on Mayday rootstock to get rid of the suckering trait. Releases from Canada include, 'Garrington', 'Goertz' and 'Robert'.

Control

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA, NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective.

References

- Acuna, U.M., et. al. 2002. *Antioxidant Capacities of Ten Edible North American Plants*. Phytotherapy Research. Volume 16, Number 1, Pp 63-65. Division of Pharmacognosy, University of Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden.
- Anonymous. c.1864. *General Directions for Collecting and Drying Medicinal Substances of the Vegetable Kingdom. List and Description of Indigenous Plants, etc. their Medicinal Properties; Forms of Administration, and Doses. Prunus Virginianus*. Confederate States of America. Surgeon General's Office.
- Boger, C.M. 1887. *Extractum Pruni Virginianae Fluidum*. American Journal of Pharmacy. Volume 59, Number 5.
- Casserly, D. 1980. *An Apple A Day Keeps the Doctor Away (But the Seeds Can Kill You!)*. The American Legion. Volume 108, Number 3. Pp. 16-17.
- CBIF. Canadian Poisonous Plants Information System. 2003. URL: (<http://www.cbif.gc.ca/>) (accessed 16 September 2003). Canadian Biodiversity Information Facility. Canada.
- Center for New Crops and Plants Products. 2003. *Stone Fruits or Drupes*. URL: (<http://hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/Default.html>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Purdue University. Center for New Crops and Plants Products. West Lafayette, Indiana USA.
- Coon, E.E. 1977. *Cyanogenesis, The Production of Hydrogen Cyanide, By Plants*. In: Keeler, R.F.; Van Kampen, K.R.; James, L.F. 1978. *Effects of Poisonous Plants On Livestock*. Academic Press. New York, New York USA. Pp. 301-310.
- Coon, N. 1963. *An American Herbal. Using Plants For Healing*. Rodale Press. Emmaus, Pennsylvania USA. Pp. 167.
- Crawford, H.S.; Kucera, C.L.; Ehrenreich, J.H. 1969. *Ozark Range and Wildlife Plants*. Agriculture Handbook Number 356. United States Department of Agriculture. Forest Service. Washington, District of Columbia USA. Pp. 204.
- Densmore, F. 1928. *How Indians Use Wild Plants For Food, Medicine and Crafts*. Dover Publications, Inc. New York, New York USA. Pp. 291.
- DOI, USGS, NPWRC. 2003. *Midwestern Wetland Flora*. URL: (<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/plntguid/species.htm#contents>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Department of Interior. United States Geologic Service. Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. Jamestown, North Dakota USA.

- Evers, R.A.; Link, R.P. 1972. *Poisonous Plants of the Midwest and Their Effects On Livestock*. Special Bulletin 24. College of Agriculture. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Champaign, Illinois USA. Pp. 77.
- Felter, H.W.; Lloyd, J.U. 1898. *Prunus virginiana (U.S.P.)- Wild Cherry*. King's American Dispensary. URL at: (<http://www.ibiblio.org/herbmed/eclectic/kings>) (accessed 31 July 2003). The Public's Library and Digital Archive. Chapel Hill, North Carolina USA.
- Fernald, M.L. 1950. *Gray's Manual of Botany, Eight (Centennial) Edition*. American Book Company, New York, New York USA. Pp. 879.
- Folwer, M.; Craigmill, A.L.; Norman, B.B.; Michelsen, P. 1982. *Livestock-Poisoning Plants of California*. Leaflet 21268. Division of Agricultural Sciences. University of California. Davis, California USA. Pp. 7-8.
- Gleason, H.A. 1952. *The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*. New York Botanical Garden. Lancaster Press, Inc. Lancaster, Pennsylvania USA. Pp. 329.
- Gough, R.E. 2002. *Growing Minor Stone Fruit in Montana*. Montana State University Extension Service. Montana State University-Bozeman. Bozeman, Montana USA.
- Hamel, P.B.; Chiltoskey, M.U. 1975. *Cherokee Plants*. Pp. 28-29.
- Hardin, J.W. 1973. *Stock-Poisoning Plants of North Carolina*. Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin Number 414 (revised). North Carolina State University. Raleigh, North Carolina USA. Pp. 74.
- Herman, D.E.; Strange, C.M.; Quam, V.C. 1996. *North Dakota Tree Handbook*. URL: (<http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/aginfo/trees/handbook.htm>) (accessed 16 September 2003). United States Department of Agriculture. Natural Resources Conservation Service. North Dakota State University Extension Service. Western Area Power Administration. North Dakota State University. North Dakota Tree Information Center. Fargo, North Dakota USA. Pp. III-14.
- Hitchcock, C.L.; Cronquist, A. 1964. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest. Part 3: Saxifragaceae to Ericaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, Washington USA. Pp. 614.
- HortiPlex Plant Database. 2003. *Prunus virginiana*. URL: (<http://hortiplex.gardenweb.com/plants>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Virtual Mirror. Garden Web. HortiPlex. Florence, Maryland USA.
- Hutchens, A.R. 1991. *Indian Herbology of North America*. Shambhala Press. Boston, Massachusetts USA. Pp. 84-86.
- Iezzoni, A.; Schmidt, H.; Ilbertini, A. 1991. *Cherries (Prunus)*. URL: (http://www.actahort.org/books/290/290_4.htm) Acta Hort. (ISHS) 290:111-176.
- Iowa State University. 2003. *Prunus virginiana (Chokecherry)*. URL: (http://project.bio.iastate.edu/trees/campustrees/ISU_trees.html) (accessed 31 July 2003). Iowa State University. Ames, Iowa USA.
- Iverson, L.R.; Ketzner, D.; Karnes, J. 2003. *Illinois Plant Information Network Database*. URL: (<http://fs.fed.us/ne/delaware/ilpin.html>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Illinois Natural History Survey and USDA Forest Service. Delaware, Ohio USA.
- Johnson, F.L., Hoagland, B.W. 1999. *Catalog of the Woody Plants of Oklahoma*. URL: (<http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/shrub/cover.htm>) (accessed 16 September 2003). Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory. Oklahoma Biological Survey. Norman, Oklahoma USA.
- Johnson, K.A. 2000. *Prunus virginiana*. URL: (<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/search.htm>) (accessed 31 July 2003). United States Department of Agriculture. Forest Service. State and Private Forestry, Northeastern Area Office, Saint Paul Field Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota USA.
- Johnson, K.A. 2000. *Prunus virginiana*. In: USDA, Forest Service Fire Effects Information System Database. URL: (<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis>) (accessed 22 January 2003). Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory. Missoula, Montana USA.
- Kindscher, K. 1992. *Medicinal Wild Plants of the Prairie. An Ethnobotanical Guide*. University Press of Kansas. University of Kansas. Lawrence, Kansas USA. Pp. 169-174.
- Kindscher, K. 1987. *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie. An Ethnobotanical Guide*. University Press of Kansas. University of Kansas. Lawrence, Kansas USA. Pp. 4-5, and 30-31, and 176-182.
- Lambert, S.M. January, 1989. *Streamside Revegetation*. Plant Materials Technical Note 12 (Revised). USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service. Spokane, Washington USA.
- Leininger, W.C.; Taylor, J.E.; Wambolt, C.L. 1977. *Poisonous Range Plants in Montana*. Cooperative Extension Service Bulletin 348. Montana State University. Bozeman, Montana USA. Pp. 44.
- Kingsbury, J.M. 1964. *Poisonous Plants of the United States and Canada*. Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey USA. Pp. 626.
- Knight, A.R. *Guide to Poisonous Plants*. URL: (http://www.colostate.edu/poisonous_plants/index.cfm) (accessed 16 September 2003). Colorado State University. College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. Fort Collins, Colorado USA.
- Little, E.L. Jr. 1953. *Check List of Native and Naturalized Trees of the United States (Including Alaska)*. 1953. United States Department of Agriculture. Forest Service. Washington, District of Columbia USA. Pp. 303-304.
- Manitoba Agriculture and Food. *Chokecherry Production in Manitoba, History and Uses*. URL: (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/fruit/bla01s00.html>) (accessed 18 February 2003).
- McGregor, R.L.; Barkley, T.M., et al. 1977. *Atlas of the Flora of the Great Plains*. Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa USA. Pp. 148.

- McGregor, R.L.; Barkley, T.M.; Brooks, R.E.; Schofield, E.K., et al. 1986. *Flora of the Great Plains*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas USA. Pp. 395-396.
- Missouri Botanical Garden. URL: (<http://www.mobot.org/gardening/plantfinder>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Saint Louis, Missouri USA.
- Nova Scotia Museum. 2003. *The Rose Family*. URL at: (<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/poison/roses.htm>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Nova Scotia Museum. The Family of Provincial Museums. Nova Scotia Canada.
- Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. 2003. *Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide*. URL: (<http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Wooster, Ohio 44691 USA.
- Plants For A Future. 2003. URL: (<http://www.ibiblio.org/>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Blagdon Cross, EX215DF, United Kingdom.
- Pruski, K.W.; Lewis, T.; Astatkie, T.; Jowak, J. 2000. *Micropropagation of Chokecherry and Pincherry Cultivars*. Plant Cell Tissue and Organ Culture. 63(2) 93:100.
- Radford, A.E.; Ahles, H.E.; Bell, C.R. 1964. *Manual of the Vascular Flora of the Carolinas*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina USA. Pp. 568-569.
- Rehder, A. 1940. *Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs Hardy in North America*. Dioscorides Press. Portland, Oregon USA. Pp. 275-281.
- Schmutz, E.M.; Freeman, B.N.; Reed, R.E. 1968. *Livestock-Poisoning Plants of Arizona*. The University of Arizona Press. University of Arizona. Tucson, Arizona USA. Pp. 9-10.
- Sykes, C. Undated. *Chokecherry Fact Sheet*. URL: (<http://www.usak.ca/agriculture/plantsci/range/index.html>) (accessed 31 July 2003). University of Saskatchewan. Department of Plant Sciences. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Canada.
- Stephens, H.A. 1980. *Poisonous Plants of the Central United States*. University Press of Kansas. Lawrence, Kansas USA. Pp. 43-45 and 151.
- Stephens, H.A. 1969. *Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines in Kansas*. University Press of Kansas. Lawrence, Kansas USA. Pp. 138-139.
- University of Michigan-Dearborn. 2003. *Native American Ethnobotany*. URL: (<http://herb.umd.unich.edu/herb/search.pl>) (accessed 28 July 2003). In: University of Michigan-Dearborn. Dearborn, Michigan USA.
- University of Minnesota. 2003. *The Right Tree Handbook. Canada Red Chokecherry*. URL: (<http://www.mnpower.com/treebook>) (accessed 22 September 2003).
- University of Pennsylvania. 2003. *Poisonous Plants*. URL: (<http://cal.nbc.upenn.edu/poison>) (accessed 31 July 2003). University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA.
- USDA, ARS, NGRP. 2003. *Dr. Duke's Phytochemical and Ethnobotanical Databases*. URL: (<http://www.ars-grin.gov/cgi-bin/duke/ethnobot.pl>) (accessed 16 September 2003). United States Department of Agriculture. Agriculture Research Service. National Genetic Research Laboratory. Beltsville, Maryland USA.
- USDA, ARS, NGRP, GRIN. 2003. URL: (<http://www.ars-grin.gov/>) (accessed 16 September 2003). United States Department of Agriculture. Agriculture Research Service. National Genetics Resources Program. Germplasm Resources Information Network. Database Management Unit. Plant Sciences Institute. Beltsville, Maryland USA.
- USDA, ARS, PPRL. 2003. *Chokecherry*. URL: (http://www.ppri.usu.edu/Poisonous_Plants.htm) (accessed 18 February and 16 September 2003). United States Department of Agriculture. Agriculture Research Service. Poisonous Plant Research Laboratory. Logan, Utah USA.
- USDA, FS. 1985. *Handbook on Seeds of Browse-Shrubs and Forbs*. Technical Publication R8-TP8. United States Department of Agriculture. Forest Service, Southern Region, Atlanta, Georgia USA. Pp. 163-164.
- USDA, ITIS. 2003. URL: (<http://itis.usda.gov/>) (accessed 16 September 2003). United States Department of Agriculture. Integrated Taxonomic Information System. Washington, District of Columbia USA.
- USDA, NRCS. 2004. The PLANTS database, version 3.5. URL: (<http://plants.usda.gov>) (accessed 14Jan04). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70874-4490 USA.
- Utah State University. 2003. *Common Chokecherry*. URL: (<http://extension.usu.edu/forestry/utahforests/treeID>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Utah State University. Forestry Extension. Provo, Utah USA.
- Van Dersal, W.R. 1938. *Native Plants of the United States. Their Erosion-Control and Wildlife Values*. Miscellaneous Publication 303. United States Department of Agriculture. Soil Conservation Service. Washington, District of Columbia USA.
- Virginia Tech Forestry Biology and Dendrology Educational Site. 2003. URL: (<http://www.cnr.vt.edu/dendro/>) (accessed 30 July 2003). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Virginia Tech Forestry Biology and Dendrology. Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 USA.
- Weed Science Society of America. 2003. *Weeds that are Poisonous When Eaten*. URL: (<http://www.wssa.net/subpages/weed/herbarium0.html>) (accessed 31 July 2003). Lawrence, Kansas USA.

Prepared By:

Wayne Crowder
Formerly USDA NRCS Pullman, Washington
Plant Materials Center

Dr. Wayne A. Geyer
Professor - Emeritus
Forestry Division
K-State Research and Extension
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

Patrick J. Broyles
Formerly USDA NRCS Manhattan Plant Materials
Center, Manhattan, KS

Published: April 2003

Edited: 14Jan04 jsp; 8Aug06 jsp; 16Jul08 jsp; 7Sep09 jfh; 14Sep09
mws; 21Jul15 jmr

For more information about this and other plants, please
contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation
District at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/> and visit the
PLANTS Web site at <http://plants.usda.gov/> or the
Plant Materials Program Web site:
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov.>

PLANTS is not responsible for the content or availability
of other Web sites.

Helping People Help the Land

USDA IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER

How to Care for a Canadian Red Cherry Tree

by Melissa J. Bell, Demand Media



Chokecherry leaves and seeds are highly toxic to humans and pets.

The Canadian red cherry tree (*Prunus virginiana*), also known as the chokecherry, is a member of the plum family native to the United States and Canada. Although it typically appears in cool northern climates, this perennial deciduous shrub can be cultivated up to U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zone 10. Often used as windbreak plants due to their spreading nature, trees can grow 20 to 30 feet tall with trunks that are 6 inches in diameter. They produce dark red fruit from July to September, which often appear in preserves, wines and sauces, despite their tart flavor. Although winter hardy and drought-tolerant in full sun and well-drained soil, chokecherries often succumb to black knot fungus and require vigilant care throughout the year.



- 1 Weed thoroughly and clear grass from the planting area, when planting new cherry seedlings. Choose a shade-tolerant area with a soil pH of 5.0 to 8.0.
- 2 Plant 1-year-old bare root seedlings 4 to 6 feet apart. Keep the area around each tree weeded for the first 3 years of growth or set down a weed barrier mat so that the tree does not have to compete for nutrients.
- 3 Water chokecherry trees frequently if rainfall is scarce. Cherry trees need at least 15 inches of water each year to survive.
- 4 Prune any suckers that grow from the roots of the tree, as they tend to form new trunks and take over.
- 5 Protect Canadian red cherries from sunscald, which causes branch damage, by shading the southwest side of the trunk with other trees or by covering the tree with white reflective paper.
- 6 Prune all broken or damaged branches in the dormant winter season. Spray any trees that have previously shown signs of prairie tent caterpillar infestations with dormant oil, spreading it over the bark.
- 7 Prune and dispose of any branches infected with the black knot disease, *Dibotryon morbosum*. Look for black swellings on branch tips that result in the death of the branch. Cut the branches 6 inches back from the infection and either wrap them in plastic before disposal or burn them. Treat infected trees with lime sulfur before leaves appear in the spring and when leaves appear in June, apply a fungicide like Bordeaux, bacillus thuringiensis or thiophanate-methyl.
- 8 Prune trees that develop cankers just behind the canker and treat them with Captan spray to prevent recurrence. Employ the same tactic when treating brown rot, which appears as dead blossoms, brown spots on fruit and spore masses.

Things You Will Need

- Canadian red cherry tree
- Pruning shears and saw
- Dormant oil
- Hose sprayer
- Protective clothing
- Lime sulfur
- Fungicide

■ Tip

Many Canadian red cherry diseases have no treatment, and trees must be removed. Some include the prunus ringspot virus, which creates yellow rings on leaves, the X-disease, which turns cherries orange and results in tree death and midge fly infestations, which turn fruit hollow.

Disinfect pruning shears after trimming diseased branches with a solution of 1 part bleach to 3 parts water.

■ Warning

Always wear protective clothing and goggles when spraying chemicals on trees.