

BWSR Featured Plant

Black Cherry and Chokecherry (*Prunus* sp.)

Rose Family (Rosaceae)



General growth form of a Black Cherry tree

Native cherries are a loved tree in Minnesota with edible fruit, beautiful flowers and highly prized wood. The genus name *Prunus* is Latin for Plum and is shared by both plums and cherries. Many cherry species are native to Minnesota, including Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*), Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), Appalachian Dwarf Cherry (*Prunus susquehanna*), Pin Cherry (*Prunus pensylvanica*), and Sand Cherry (*Prunus pumila*). Cherries can be shrubs and trees and grow in a wide variety of conditions. Pollinators love the flowers for the nectar and pollen. The fruit is a food source for many wildlife species.



General growth form of a Chokecherry shrub

Identification

Black Cherry

(*Prunus serotina*)

The Black Cherry tree can reach up to 50ft tall. Depending on where it is growing the trunk can be long with no branches near the base, in the forest, or short with many branches and an irregularly spreading crown, when growing in the open. The bark of the Black Cherry is smooth and bright reddish-brown with lenticels on younger trees. As it grows older the bark becomes dark brown and plated with large fissures.

The leaves are simple alternate and are rounded lanceolate shaped with a sharp tip and fine blunt-toothed edges. Commonly, there are small reddish hairs on the underside of the leaf. There are several glands at the junction of the leaf stalk and the leaf blade.

The flowers are clustered on a long nodding raceme. The petals are white and round with small serrations along the edges. The fruit of the Black Cherry is a bunch of round drupes about the size of a pea that usually ripens in late summer. They are reddish purple or black when ripe and contain a single hard seed. The sepals usually persist on the fruit.



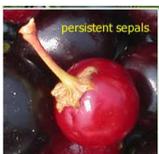
Black Cherry Leaf



Young bark



Older bark



Fruit with persistent sepals (Minnesota Wildflowers)



Five petal flowers

Chokecherry

(*Prunus virginiana*)

Chokecherries are shrubs or small trees that are thicket-forming and usually stay under 3 feet tall but can be as tall as 20ft. The shape is irregular, they sucker heavily and can spread through rhizomes. The bark when young is reddish gray with lenticels. As it grows older the bark gets darker and the lenticels grow into shallow grooves.

The leaves are simple alternate with an oval shape and an abruptly tapering tip. The edges are slightly serrated. There are no hairs on the underside of the leaves.

The flowers are clustered on long racemes. The petals are round and white with small serrations along the edges. Chokecherry fruit is a shiny round drupe. It is reddish purple or black when ripe. The sepals do not persist on Chokecherries.



Chokecherry Leaf



Bark



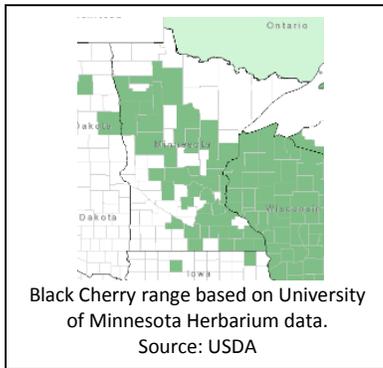
Fruit without persistent sepals



Five petal flowers (Minnesota Wildflowers)

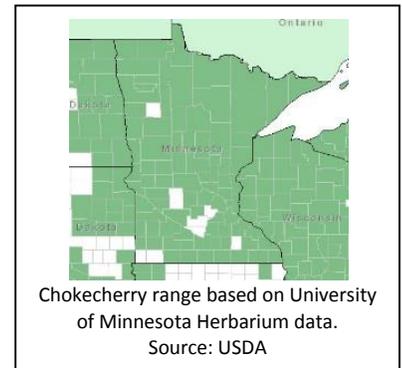
Chokecherry Wetland
Indicator Status: FACU

Black Cherry Wetland
Indicator Status: FACU



Range

Both Chokecherries and Black Cherries are wide spread throughout the state of Minnesota. Chokecherry is one of the most common trees in North America. It can grow and thrive in many conditions, including forests, prairies, and mid-alpine regions. The Black Cherry is not as wide spread, but is still a common tree. With the absence of fire, Black Cherry can inhabit the understory of forests and open fields.



Uses

Black Cherry and Chokecherries can be used as food. Chokecherries are mainly used in jams or jellies and for baking because the fruit is very tart. Black Cherries are used to flavor rum and brandy, and to make juice, jellies, and jams. Many *Prunus* species produce small stone seeds that contain hydrocyanic acid which can be poisonous when consumed. Some of the leaves and stems can also contain hydrocyanic acid. The wood of the Black Cherry is a very highly prized for its beautiful deep red-brown color, strength, and close grain. Black Cherry has been use in mine field reclamations. Birds, rabbits, bears, and other animals love the fruit of both Black Cherry trees and Chokecherry trees. The pungent flowers attract many pollinators.

Primary Uses

- Pollinator Habitat
- Food source
- Aesthetics
- Wood

Planting Recommendations

Both species can grow in a variety of areas and soil types. They can be obtained from local nurseries as containerized plants and as seed. Black Cherries are more tolerant of semi-shade areas. Trees can produce viable seed and fruit when about 10 years old. After a cold stratification, Cherry tree seeds will germinate in loose soil and forest floor litter. Both types of cherries can reproduce by root and stem suckering. The thin bark of the Black Cherry makes it highly susceptible to girdling.

Planting Methods

- Stratified seeds
- Containerized plants

References

MN DNR: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees_shrubs/deciduous/blackcherry.html
 Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/tree/chokecherry> and <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/tree/black-cherry>
 USDA: <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=prse2> and http://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_prvi.pdf and http://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_prvi.pdf

Similar Species

Common Buckthorn and Glossy Buckthorn can look very similar to Black Cherry trees and especially Chokecherry trees. All of those species have relatively smooth bark when young, with lenticels and similar oval shaped leaves. Glossy Buckthorn has shiny leaves, whereas both the cherries do not. Common Buckthorn the leaf veins curve upwards towards the tip of the leaf. In cherries the veins go slightly up towards to the tip but do not curve and instead go directly to the edges of the leaf. Other, less common, cherry species include the Pin Cherry, Sand Cherry, and Appalachian Dwarf Cherry.



Glossy Buckthorn leaf



Common Buckthorn leaf



Black Cherry leaf



Pin Cherry leaf



Chokecherry leaf



Sand Cherry leaf



Appalachian Dwarf cherry leaf