



Did those cherries (genus *Prunus*) taste really good this season? You may be able to grow some in your own yard to get that really fresh taste even faster. When appropriate cultivars are chosen, they are sited properly, and some good care is provided – tasty fruit will definitely follow.

Cultivar selection is so important - not only for plant health and fruit production, but for the attitude of the gardener as well. Pleasure in the success of our plants encourages those good cultural practices to continue. A large part of the achievement of that success is in the choice of materials. In this part of the country, production of cherries is focused on the tart cultivars (*Prunus cerasus*). There are some great cold hardy, disease resistant, proven producers that are self-fruitful (no other trees are needed for pollination). These include 'Montmorency' – a cultivar that is quite common in much of this continent. The fruit is a nice bright red, with a yellow-gold interior flesh. Leaf spot can be a problem, but not tremendously severe. A couple of cultivars suggested by fruit crop expert, Dr. Teryl Roper, at UW-Madison are 'North Star' and 'Meteor'. 'North Star' has dark red (mahogany is the industry color description) skin and a red interior flesh. Resistance to leaf spot seems to be pretty good. 'Meteor' is also showing good resistance to leaf spot, has bright red skin and a yellow interior flesh color. Both of these are cold hardy and produce well under normal conditions. Bush type cherries - sand (*Prunus besseyi*) and Nanking (*Prunus tomentosa*) - produce smaller sized, edible fruit with an overall structure that make a nice addition to any landscape. These are not self-fruitful so a pollinator cultivar must be provided. Sweet cherries (*Prunus avium*) are marginally hardy for consistent production. If you are game for a challenge – try one or two - just provide another cultivar as these must cross-pollinate. A couple of newer cultivars out of Cornell's work are 'Black Gold' and 'White Gold'. If you do decide to try any of the sweet cherries, do so with caution as production and cold hardiness are iffy for us.

Choosing a good area to plant cherries involves good air flow, lots of sun, soil a bit on the sandy side and access to water. Air flow helps to keep the trees healthy, happy, and somewhat protected from late season frosts. If you have a landscape with a nice grade slope, that is even better for the trees or bushes. Make sure that there is a least 100 square feet per tree for optimal growth. All fruit does best with sun, sun, sun, and more sun - 6 -8 hours of full sun per day will go a long way. While cherries need one to two inches of water per week, they do not like standing water either on the trunk or drowning their roots. Choosing a site with soil that is somewhat sandy will help to keep that water moving through. Keep in mind that Momma Nature doesn't always provide as much water as our plants need, so think ahead and make sure you have access to water

for those thirsty cherries.

Pruning of cherry trees and bushes differs slightly. There are many methods that can be used for pruning but in general the choices are central leader - where pruning is accomplished around a central stem to achieve a rather conical shape; modified leader - the central stem is removed but the overall shape is still rather conical; and the open center - where the interior/central portions of the tree is removed for maximum light penetration. Different pruning techniques are used for different desired end results. Often the modified and central leader forms are used in situations where there is a need or desire to have a tree that can provide good landscape structure as well as moderate fruit production. For true max production – many growers feel that the open center technique is the only technique to use. For bush cherries, a renewal pruning technique – yearly removal the oldest stems at the ground level - is optimal as these cherries produce best on newer and stronger stem/branch growth.

Diseases and pests can render all of our efforts useless if we let them. Leaf spot, black knot, and brown rot are all fungal pathogens that are with us every year. Good fall cleanup can help. Removing all mummified fruit, leaves, and debris from around the trees will help to interrupt the disease cycle – lessening it somewhat in subsequent years. Insects, birds and nuisance animals (raccoons) can decimate a crop, or even kill a tree, in minutes. Taking proper precautions - such as a preventative spray program for insects and diseases, and using netting to prevent bird and nuisance damage – will help you remain in control of your trees. Any of these must be undertaken with thoughtfulness, attention to detail, a bit of homework, and much forethought to provide them as needed within the appropriate time frame.

The last thought on cherries – picking them correctly is as important as growing them correctly. The cherry industry and research universities have done numerous studies on harvesting and storage. Standards for tart and bush cherries are to pick them without the stems attached to the fruit. For sweet cherries, leave the stems on when they are ripe. You may ask - Why? – and with good reason. Each species will last longer in storage if picked as described above. And after you put the work into growing the cherries, it would be a shame to muck it up at harvest time, wouldn't it?