

# Growing Cherries

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Oakland County



Growing cherries in home plantings is frequently very disappointing. The foliage and fruit are susceptible to injury by several insects and diseases. Several timely spray applications are required to produce sound fruit. Birds frequently consume the fruit as it begins to color, but before it is fully mature. Covering the tree with cheese-cloth or other netting material is the only effective method of saving the crop from birds. Sweet cherry (*Prunus cerasus*) varieties are more difficult to grow than sour cherry (*Prunus avium*) types. Sweet cherry trees are larger, more susceptible to cold injury, and the fruits are very attractive to birds.

## Tree Selection and Planting

Know the pollination requirements of the variety you intend to plant. At least 2 varieties of sweet cherries are necessary for pollination. Sour cherry trees pollinate themselves and only one tree is required for fruit production. Nurseries sell one and 2-year-old trees, but one-year-old trees are easier to establish. Unpack trees immediately upon arrival and plant as soon as possible. If early spring planting must be delayed, heel in the trees temporarily by laying them in a shallow trench in the ground and cover the roots with soil to keep them moist. Drying of the tree roots prior to planting is a major factor in tree losses.

Select the best site for your trees. Avoid heavy, poorly drained soils or an area in which water stands at any time during the year. If your yard is sloping, try to plant at the top of the slope to obtain good air circulation. Avoid planting in the lower areas of the yard because "frost pockets" can form which may cause flower bud

death in the spring. Plant trees only in full sunlight. Prune off all damaged or broken roots. Dig a hole large enough to accommodate the tree's root system. Place the tree in the hole and spread the roots. Place top soil around the roots. Tamp the soil firmly with your foot after the roots are covered. When the hole is 2/3 full, water the tree and then fill in the remaining soil. Space sour cherry trees about 20 feet apart, and sweet cherry varieties at least 25 feet apart.

## Pruning

Train the trees to a central leader system. Cut the tree to 3 feet high after planting. Train the tree to a central trunk with scaffold or lateral branches. Select the first branch 20 to 24 inches above the ground and keep 6-10" between the branches. Select branches spaced around the trunk. Remove sharp angled branches, selecting those that grow at a wide angle to the main trunk. Prune mature trees annually, removing dead and broken branches and thinning out weaker branches. Remove branches growing back through the tree. Head back branches that are too long or too high.

## General Maintenance

Water young cherry trees when periods of drought occur during the first few growing seasons. Fertilization of cherry trees growing in lawns is not necessary if regular lawn fertilization is performed. Do not use combination fertilizer-weed killer products near cherry trees.

The sweet cherry varieties Bing, Lambert, Napoleon, and Emperor Francis do not pollinate each other and require another variety for pollination.

## Harvesting

Pick cherries with stems attached and refrigerate immediately for best keeping quality. Do not injure the small spurs to which the fruit is attached while picking.

## Diseases

- *Cherry Leaf Spot*

Fungus disease which causes small, purple spots to develop on the leaves causing leaf yellowing and early leaf drop. Remove all fallen leaves which may serve as a source of reinfection and spray with fungicide when new foliage develops and at 2 week intervals in late July.

- *Brown rot*

A fungus disease causing rot of cherries while still attached to the tree and after harvest. Control with fungicides applied in bloom and when fruit begins to mature.

## Winter Injury

Long cracks in the bark caused by sudden drops in temperature or very cold temperatures. Painting trunks of young trees with white latex paint helps prevent this type of injury.

## Insects

- *Cherry maggot*

Small worms in the fruit are the larvae of the adult fly. Control with insecticide application during June and July.

- *Plum curculio*

Large, white larvae in fruit is from adult beetle, they become active when petals are falling. Spray with insecticide when small fruit are shedding shucks or husk shortly after petals fall.

Type	Variety	Pollination Requirements
Sour	Montmorency	Self-pollinating
Sour (dwarf)	North Star	Self-pollinating
Sweet	Windsor	Needs pollination by another variety (These will pollinate each other)
Sweet	Schmidt	Needs pollination by another variety (These will pollinate each other)
Sweet	Hedalfingen	Needs pollination by another variety (These will pollinate each other)