



## Cooperative Extension Publications

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## Native Trees and Shrubs for Maine Landscapes

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### Black Cherry

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#### *(Prunus serotina)*

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*Developed by Marjorie Peronto, associate Extension professor, University of Maine Cooperative Extension; and Reeser C. Manley, assistant professor of horticulture, University of Maine.*

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#### Go native!

This series of publications is the result of a five-year research project that evaluated the adaptability of a variety of native trees and shrubs to the stresses of urban and residential landscapes in Maine. Non-native invasive plants pose a serious threat to Maine's biodiversity. Plants such as Japanese barberry, shrubby honeysuckle, and Asiatic bittersweet, originally introduced for their ornamental features, have escaped from our landscapes, colonizing natural areas and displacing native plants and animals. By landscaping with native plants, we can create vegetation corridors that link fragmented wild areas, providing food and shelter for the native wildlife that is an integral part of our ecosystem. Your landscape choices can have an impact on the environment that goes far beyond your property lines.

### Description

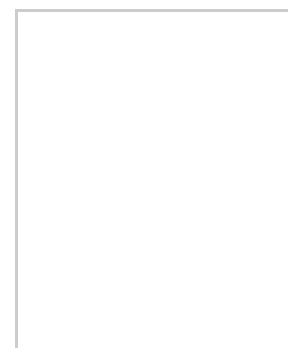
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**Form:** a tall, columnar tree becoming rounded with age, with ascending branches and slightly weeping twigs

**Size:** 50 to 60 feet tall, half as wide

**Ornamental characteristics:**

- loose, pendulous spikes of white spring flowers
- fruit clusters transition from green to red to purplish black,



- contrasting with shiny summer foliage
- yellow to orange fall color

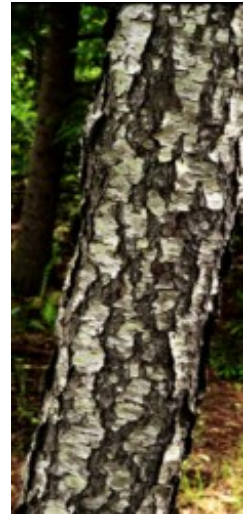


Photo by Reeser C. Manley

## Landscape Use

Black cherry needs full sun and a moist but well-drained soil to flourish. Use it as a single specimen tree, placing it in the landscape where you can appreciate its spring flowers, ruggedly handsome bark, and autumn foliage, but where its small black cherries will not stain your driveway or patio when they fall from the tree in late summer.

Over the years, any black cherry will serve as host to eastern tent caterpillars and possibly black knot disease. If you are intolerant of the caterpillar webs and accompanying defoliation, or of the black, knobby fungus growths that cover black knot-infected branches, avoid using this species.

Despite these problems, black cherry deserves a spot in any landscape devoted to wildlife. The cherries are an important food for songbirds and small mammals, and the plant is host to over 200 species of butterflies and moths.



Photo by Reeser C. Manley

## Culture

**Hardiness:** USDA zone 3b

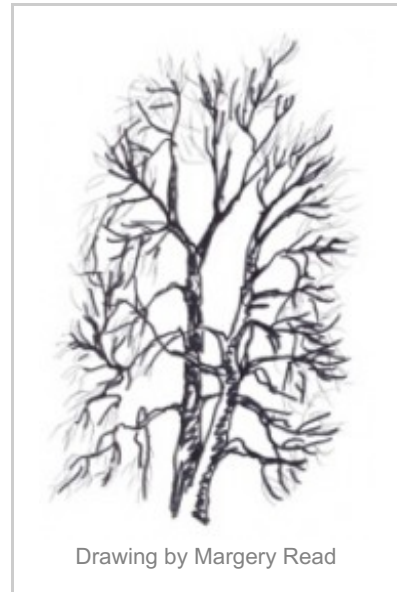
**Soil requirements:** prefers moderately to well-drained soils

**Light requirements:** full sun

**Stress tolerances:**

soil compaction—intolerant  
pollution—intolerant  
deicing salts—tolerant  
urban heat islands—tolerant  
drought—tolerant  
seasonal flooding—very intolerant

**Insect and disease problems:** black knot and eastern tent caterpillar



## Wildlife Value

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From spring through summer, black cherry is host to over 200 species of butterflies and moths, including coral and striped hairstreaks as well as Canadian and Eastern tiger swallowtails. In winter, the cherries are eaten by some 70 bird species, including ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasants, woodpeckers, cedar waxwings, thrushes, and grosbeaks. At times the birds may become intoxicated on fermented berries; look for glassy-eyed, wobbling birds under late-season fruiting trees.

Many mammals also enjoy the cherries. Bears and raccoons will climb the trees for the fruit, while foxes, chipmunks, rabbits, white-footed mice, and squirrels frequently feed on fallen fruits.

Twigs and leaves contain high levels of hydrocyanic acid (also called prussic acid), which is poisonous to cattle and humans. However, deer and moose are not sensitive to these compounds, and readily browse black cherry.

## Maintenance

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**Irrigation:** During the establishment period, defined as one year after planting for each inch of trunk diameter at planting time, water your trees regularly during the growing season. Give the root zone of each tree 1 inch of water per week; in general, a tree's root zone extends twice as wide as its canopy. After the establishment period, provide supplemental irrigation during periods of severe drought.

**Fertilization:** Landscape trees and shrubs should not be fertilized unless a soil test indicates a need. Correct soil pH, if necessary, by amending the backfill soil. No nitrogen fertilizer should be added at planting or during the first growing season.

### **To learn more about native woody plants**

Visit the Eastern Maine Native Plant Arboretum at University of Maine Cooperative Extension's Penobscot County office, 307 Maine Avenue in Bangor. Established in 2004, the arboretum displays 24 different native tree and shrub species that can be used in managed landscapes.

*Reviewed by Cathy Neal, Extension professor, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.*

*Photos by Reeser C. Manley.*

*Illustration by Margery Read, Extension master gardener.*

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