

## Cherry - *Prunus sp.*

**General information:** Few trees exemplify the spirit of Japanese bonsai more than a lovely cherry in bloom. Unfortunately, the blooms last only a short while, and the bonsaist must be careful to design the tree to generate interest when not in bloom. A vast number of species and cultivars are available, displaying many different variations in flowers and fruit.

**Family:** *Rosaceae*.

**Lighting:** Full sun, but semi-shade in summer.

**Temperature:** Varies greatly depending on variety.

**Watering:** Most varieties need frequent watering, especially in summer. Reduce watering in winter. Do not allow the flowers to get wet or they will rot. *P. tormentosa* needs less water than most cherries, and care must be taken to see that it does not become waterlogged.

**Feeding:** Every two weeks after flowering has finished through late summer. Use liquid bonsai fertilizer or half-strength general purpose food, switching to a formula high in potassium towards the end of summer. *P. mahaleb* requires a break in feeding through the heat of summer, but feeding may be resumed till mid-autumn.

**Repotting:** Every second year in spring, using basic bonsai soil. *P. serrulata* may need annual repotting. *P. serrulata* and *P. mahaleb* can also be transplanted in late autumn, after leaves fall.

**Pruning and wiring:** Suitable for all styles except broom. Suitable for all sizes, but some varieties have coarse branch structure and large leaves. Be careful to choose a species or cultivar which is appropriately proportioned for your design. Prune back tips during growth as necessary. Developmental pruning of branches may be performed in winter. Cherries are sometimes displayed with significant amounts of deadwood. Remove flowers as they fade. Wiring can be done in spring-summer, but care must be taken to protect the bark.

**Propagation:** By grafting in early spring. Beware of bad grafts when purchasing! Difficult to grow from cuttings.

**Pests and diseases:** Not tolerant of air pollution. Birds love to eat the flower buds, so some protection may be necessary in spring. Lots of bugs love to chomp the leaves, although some varieties are more resistant to insects and disease than others.

### **Some species suitable for bonsai:**

- *Prunus apetala*: Choji cherry
- *Prunus avium*: wild cherry, gean, sweet cherry, mazzard - This cherry features white blossoms in spring followed by small red-purple fruit. It has the added attraction of crimson autumn foliage, and bark which

turns red and peels with age. Can grow to 40 ft. and is hardy in zones 6-8. Needs cross-pollination between several cultivars.

- *Prunus avium* 'Plena': double gean, double-flowered mazzard - Similar to the species, but with double-flowers. It sterile, but the flowers last longer than those of varieties with fertile flowers.
- *Prunus campanulata*: Formosa cherry, Taiwan cherry - Hardy only to zone 8, this cherry has rose red flowers and red fruit.
- *Prunus caroliniana*: Carolina laurelcherry - Small white flowers followed by black, bitter fruit. It has 2-4 inch glossy evergreen leaves, which are quite attractive, but make the tree suitable for only large-sized bonsai.
- *Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette': Hally Jolivette cherry, pink flowering cherry - Bears small white flowers tinged pink. Notable for its delicate twigging.
- *Prunus incisa*: Fuji cherry - This cherry has a nice autumn show, with leaves of orange. It has red or pink flowers and purple-black fruit. It is hardy to zone 6.
- *Prunus japonica*: Japanese single bush cherry, Japanese plum - Hardy to zone 4, this popular cherry has pink to white flowers and wine-red fruit.
- *Prunus lannesiana* cv. 'Superba': Sato cherry
- *Prunus maackii*: Amur chokecherry - A very hardy cherry, one of the few with flowers that are unspectacular. However, it makes up for this deficit through its showy copper bark. Hardy in zones 3-6.
- *Prunus mahaleb*: St. Lucie cherry - A cherry with interesting foliage, it has bright green heart-shaped leaves which turn yellow in autumn. Mature plants bear masses of white flowers followed by black fruit, but young plants flower little.
- *Prunus padus*: bird cherry - the small, purple-black, bitter fruit of this cherry follows spikes of white, fragrant flowers.
- *Prunus pissardii*: flowering cherry - Bears pink to white single flowers.
- *Prunus pseudocerasus* - This cherry has white, fragrant flowers and is hardy to zone 6.
- *Prunus sargentii*: Sargent cherry - Of interest due to its masses of small flowers in spring and its scarlet autumn display. It can grow up to 50 feet in nature. Hardy in zones 5-9.
- *Prunus serotina*: black cherry - Red-black fruit follows spikes of flowers. Its large leaves - up to 5 inches - make it unsuitable for all but the largest sizes. Hardy in zones 3-8.
- *Prunus serrula*: birch bark cherry.
- *Prunus serrulata*: flowering cherry, Japanese cherry, Oriental cherry, Japanese flowering cherry - Another popular cherry, this one has white flowers and black fruits. Many cultivars are available. hardy in zones 6-8.
- *Prunus serrulata* 'Hisakura': flowering cherry - Bears dep pink single flowers.
- *Prunus serrulata* 'Kanzan': flowering cherry - Used mainly for its remarkable flowers, which are large, pink, and so profuse they can completely obscure the branches. Unfortunately, it tends to be large and coarse otherwise.
- *Prunus serrulata* 'Kiku-shidare sakura': flowering cherry - This cherry's pink double-flowers appear before the leaves in spring.
- *Prunus serrulata* 'Shirotae': flowering cherry - Bears white and fragrant semi-double flowers.
- *Prunus sinensis*: bush cherry - This small-leaved cherry bears pink or white pom-pom shaped flowers.
- *Prunus subhirtella*: Higan cherry, rosebud cherry - The species has white to pink flowers and black fruit, but many cultivars are available.

Hardy in zones 6-8.

- Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis': autumn cherry, Higan cherry - a lovely cultivar, for multiple reasons. Its small leaves color well in autumn, and it bears sporadic white or pink flowers on bare wood during frost-free periods in winter. It has the added advantage of more delicate twigging than most cherries.
- Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis rosea': pink autumn cherry - A pink version of the above.
- Prunus subhirtella 'Fukubana': pink spring cherry - Has deep pink flowers in early spring.
- Prunus subhirtella 'Pendula': weeping cherry - Of interest due to its contorted weeping branches. It is the most common cv. of this species, often found as a garden tree, and can grow to 60 ft.
- Prunus tormentosa: downy cherry, Korean bush-cherry, Nanking cherry, red fruit, Chinese bush fruit, Tormentosa cherry - One of the most hardy cherries, it will thrive to zone 3. It bears white flowers and red berries. The young growth and undersides of leaves have a downy texture.
- Prunus virginiana: chokecherry - A shrubby cherry otherwise similar to P. serotina.
- Prunus yedoensis: Yedo flowering cherry, Yoshino cherry - Produces very showy pink to white flowers followed by unremarkable black fruit. It grows to 40 ft. with 4 inch leaves, making it suitable only for large sizes. Hardy in zones 6-8.

### **Bibliography:**

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