

Workshop Title: Sour Cherries

Speaker & their title: Bob Bors, University of Saskatchewan

Executive Summary: An overview for people considering growing sour cherries. The talk covered everything from best varieties, to pruning and harvesting with a mechanical harvester.

About Sour Cherries:

Sour cherries are the processing cherries. Use them to make pies and juice.

Also called tart cherries, pie cherries, processing cherries.

Plants bred at U of Saskatchewan get about as tall as a person. Dwarf sour cherries are easier to work with.

They are self-compatible (need only one variety). They need bees for pollination.

Varieties:

Juliet: most hardy for Saskatchewan; also has nice flavour.

Cupid: Not as productive. Blooms one week after other cherries, so if you have a year that's a disaster for other cherries, would still get Cupid.

Romeo: Considered the best tasting of all of them.

Crimson Passion: Is the shortest plant and crispest cherry. Around 22 brix.

Valentine: red in colour.

Cherries by colour:

Morrello, meaning dark

Amorello meaning not dark.

Planting Cherries:

Cherries bloom after the apples and need more wind protection than other species.

Cherries love well drained loam or sandy loam. *Prunus* species are less tolerant of wet soil.

Plant deep.

Irrigation for first 3 years, after that, they can take care of themselves.

Fruiting by year 3 or 4.

The best indicator if a plant is going to winter kill is if at the first frost it's still making new leaves.

What doesn't work:

- grass will compete with bushes.
- Plastic can lead to shallow root systems.

Common to have partial dieback first spring.

Pruning:

- Tree form for narrow base bushes for upright harvesters.
- Bush form for sideways harvesters.

Reciprical saw, good for pruning roots.

Prune late winter, early spring.

Remove 25% or less.

Minimal pruning during establishment year.

North-South rows have less suckering than East-West. If you have sideways harvester, plant East-West.

Pruning tree form for tall trees and bush for dwarfs.

Pests:

Deer are the worst. They can smell the cherries. You need a deer fence.
Also, cherry fruit fly and Canker

GF-120, a biopesticide, works as an organic solution for the cherry fruit fly.
Smells like molasses.

Brown Rot: overwinters in the old fruit and can spread. If you have brown rot, you really need to remove the fruit.

Fruiting:

If you have flowers but no fruit: could be due to late frost. Also, could be lack of bees or immature trees.

Harvesting:

Can harvest one week earlier than peak or one week later than peak. But two weeks before and the flavour really suffers.

Resources:

Sour cherry manual produced by U of Saskatchewan. Cheapest way is to order it through the U of Saskatchewan library: www.fruit.usask.ca

Questions:

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Any problems with birds?
Nope. Birds like small fruit.

Do they get black knot?
No

What's your market?
Dried cherries were decided as one of the best markets. Ice cream and wine is also good. Frozen pitted cherries for pies. Sour cherries are usually not marketed fresh.

Where do you buy the trees?
The website lists all the suppliers.
www.fruit.usask.ca