

# FLOWERING CHERRIES

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When it comes to flowering trees, few can compare to the splendor of the flowering cherries. Just about every neighborhood has one or two flowering cherries, and in some areas the streets are lined with them. There are many kinds of flowering cherries, one to fit almost any preference or need. Flowering cherries range in size anywhere from small specimen trees to large street trees. For specific information on the different types, please see the separate page on flowering cherry varieties.

**Latin name:** *Prunus sp.*

**Type:** Deciduous trees

**Exposure:** Full sun to part shade

**Growth rate:** Slow-moderate. Varies

**Hardiness:** To about -20° F

**Size:** 10'-30', varies

**Soil:** Well-drained

**Fall color:** Yellow-orange, varies

## How to select a flowering cherry

There is a flowering tree to meet just about every need. Consider the size. Do you want a tree that provides shade, or do you just want a small tree to fill a space in a corner? Do you have a preference for white or pink? Are you trying to have a tree blooming at a certain time to line up with other plants? By answering these questions, you can then use the chart or ask for assistance in helping find the perfect tree for your situation.

## Where can I plant a flowering cherry?

Flowering cherries need a loose, well drained soil to really reach their full potential. Heavy, compacted soil will stress your tree, and can also result in major surface rooting which can be a pedestrian hazard and cause damage to walkways or other structures. Be sure to keep them out of water-logged areas, as this will make your tree very unhealthy. Try to keep your cherries away from surfaces that reflect heat strongly, like concrete, brick, or light colored surfaces as this can scorch the plant, especially on the south side of a house. Plant in a place where bloom debris will not be a hazard. Wet flower petals can become very slippery, especially on concrete, so keep that in mind when placing your tree. It is also a good idea to keep your tree away from level walkways or paved areas, as the roots can in time heave soil upwards, which may potentially be damaging after enough time.

## Will they produce fruit?

Rarely, if at all. This will depend on the variety and the particular year. Some varieties are incapable of producing fruit, while others will produce a little in a good growing year. This is rarely a cause for concern, as the fruit, if any, is minimal, and usually disposed of by birds shortly after ripening.

## How and when should I prune?

The best time to do almost any pruning is in the winter months when the leaves are gone. As for methods, keep in mind that cherries are very resilient, and will recover rapidly after a severe pruning. So, do what you need to do, and don't worry too much about doing major harm by pruning too hard. Some times, especially with older unmaintained trees, this major pruning may become necessary. It is a good idea to thin the tree and remove any crossing branches for the first few years to establish a good growth habit. Also, any really long or out of place shoots can be shortened or removed. Be sure to remove any dead wood or branches, and if a part of the tree becomes infected by a bacteria or fungus, you may want to selectively prune out some of the diseased growth.

## Is it true that all cherries are disease prone?

Flowering cherries are in the family *Rosaceae* which is, in general, susceptible to several fungal and bacterial problems **if left unchecked and untreated**. Two great ways to reduce this are to keep the plant growing healthily, and a dormant spray program. A healthy tree will naturally fight off many potentially harmful problems. And a dormant spray will clean up any overwintering pests and diseases, preventing or greatly reducing the outbreak of any big problems.

## **Troubleshooting:**

Holes in leaf - Small, circular holes randomly scattered about the leaf surface are usually an indication of a leaf spot, often referred to as “shot-hole”, referring to the buckshot pattern on the leaf.. Most first reactions are to assume that it’s an insect, but this is rarely the case, especially in early spring when most of this type of damage appears. The leaf spot infects the newly emerging leaf, and kills off tissue, so when the leaf fully unfolds, you see a hole where the dead spots were. This won’t kill your tree, but is usually more of an eyesore. Unfortunately, once the damage occurs, there is really no way to change that until you get some new growth. Once you know you have a problem, be sure to treat in winter with a dormant spray to prevent future outbreaks.

Irregularly shaped holes and notches that occur after the leaves have fully unfolded may indicate an insect of some sort. Be sure to identify the responsible bug first so you can use the correct insecticide. This will generally happen in the later season.

Splitting, peeling bark - Unless it’s a copperbark cherry (*Prunus serrula*), this isn’t a good sign. This usually means that the tree is getting too much reflected heat from a nearby object, like a concrete surface, or a light colored house. You will need to provide a protective wrap for the trunk, such as a white reflected paint or tree wrap. Splitting bark can also be a sign of a bacterial infection.

Scorched branch ends - Usually indicates a bacterial affliction called “fireblight”. You will see a dark coloration if you peel some of the bark back. This is due to the bacteria plugging up the water conducting channels, causing the growth past that point to shrivel up and die. Prune off infected parts and spray with a copper dormant spray in winter, or a good disease control product.

Pitch coming out of trunk - Keep in mind that cherries don’t actually produce pitch, so this is a problem. Sap will be clear in color, and is not to be worried about if you see a bit of it in spring. If the substance is dark or amber colored, like pine pitch, then you most likely have a bacterial problem, and need to treat accordingly.

Whole branches die back, sawdust on ground - Cherries have a borer (insect) which can seriously injure or kill some varieties. This isn’t very common, but if you notice the symptoms, and find a little pinhole at the base of the dead branch, you’ve got a borer and need to spray for it. If you dig into the hole a little you will find a rather unpleasant little grub who will be quite irritated at being disturbed.