YARDS AND GARDENS

SWEET CHERRY VARIETIES
FOR WESTERN WASHINGTON

Prior to the development of irrigation in central Washington in the early 1900's, northwestern Washington was an important area for fruit production including cherries. Bing and Royal Ann, with Black Tartarian as the pollinizer, were the important varieties. While commercial production is no longer feasible, home production is definitely possible.

FIVE PRIMARY HAZARDS

There are five primary hazards to cherry production—birds, fruit-cracking, brown rot, bacterial canker, and root rot. Birds are by far the most serious, with netting being the only effective control at present. Brown rot, a fungus disease, can be serious in damp weather but can be controlled by fungicide sprays (Benlate, Captan, or wettable sulfur). Bacterial canker can be serious in some areas, causing dying of branches or the entire tree. Copper sprays, such as bordeaux mixture, may give partial control. Some varieties, e.g., Van, Bing, Lambert, and Royal Ann, are particularly susceptible; others, e.g., Sam and Corum, have some tolerance to the disease. Root rot is usually caused by planting cherries in an area with inadequate drainage or setting the tree too deeply in the soil at planting. It could also be caused by a soil-borne disease, Verticillium wilt. For further information on cherry diseases see EB 0668, available at your local WSU Cooperative Extension office.

CAUSE OF FRUIT-CRACKING

Fruit-cracking is caused by the absorption of water directly through the skin of the cherry as it nears maturity. Some varieties, such as Bing, are highly susceptible. Royal Ann (Napoleon) and Lambert are also quite susceptible. The Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Unit has been evaluating dark sweet cherries since 1963 for their resistance to cracking and general adaptability to the area. Fruit-cracking varies considerably from year to year, depending on when rainfall occurs. Lime sprays at 5-8 pounds per 100 gallons applied 1-2 weeks before harvest may reduce cracking significantly.

Listed below are descriptions of some of the more promising varieties based on trials in the Mount Vernon area. Note that Bing and Lambert are not recommended. These varieties, commonly grown in the commercial cherry-producing areas of eastern Washington, are not well adapted to western Washington because of their susceptibility to rain-cracking. It may be more difficult to find varieties listed below in your local nursery or garden center than the more common Bing, Lambert, or Royal Ann. Your continued effort to obtain adapted varieties will stimulate nurseries to grow or purchase them to meet the demand.

PROMISING VARIETIES

Promising red or black-fruited varieties, in approximate order of maturity from early to late, include:

Early Burlat: French variety recently released by USDA; ripens in June; large, firm meaty fruits of excellent quality; cracking in some seasons. Must be protected from birds.

Venus: New from Canada; ripe in early July; only medium firm, but resists cracking; may overbear with smaller fruit some years. Not pollinized by Van.

Sam: Canadian variety with large, jet-black, firm, heart-shaped fruits of good quality. Highly resistant to cracking; ripens about a week before Bing.
**Bing:** Not recommended for western Washington because of its susceptibility to cracking and bacterial canker. Standard of quality in commercial areas. Included here to show maturity date. Ripens in mid-to-late July (if the birds don’t get it).

**Stella and Compact Stella:** See following discussion of self-fruitful varieties. Both are smaller, slightly softer than Bing, and thus less subject to cracking; ripens with Bing.

**Van:** Probably the best quality variety for this area; equal to Bing; resistant to cracking; more subject to gummosis (bacterial canker) than most varieties. Excellent pollinizer for all other varieties except Venus.

### WHITE OR PINK VARIETIES

There are no completely satisfactory white or pink cherries for western Washington. Of the older varieties, Royal Ann is quite susceptible to rain-cracking. A pure yellow cultivar, Gold is highly resistant to rain, often escapes bird damage because of its lack of a pink blush, but is smaller in size and lower in quality than Royal Ann. The newer sorts, Rainier, Corum, and Bada may be fairly well adapted to coastal conditions. Rainier, a high quality new Washington-USDA introduction, is being planted commercially in the eastern part of the state but may crack excessively here because of its firm texture. Corum, from Oregon, is less susceptible to cracking but of lower quality than Royal Ann or Rainier. Bada, a new introduction from California, has not been tested in western Washington, but it has performed well in Oregon’s Willamette Valley. All of these varieties will pollinize each other, and all but Royal Ann will pollinize all of the dark-fruited varieties.

Varieties generally not well adapted to the Puget Sound region include: Bing, Lambert, Deacon, Chinook, Vista, and Ulster (cracking); Black Tartarian, Windsor, and Black Republican (lacking in size or quality).

### SELF-FRUITFUL VARIETIES

A breakthrough was made in England about 30 years ago with the development of cherries that would set fruit with their own pollen (self-fruitful). At Summerland, Canada, a plant breeder, K. O. Lapins, incorporated this valuable character into a commercial variety called Stella. Stella is very similar to Bing in quality and more resistant to cracking. It is not only self-fruitful, but will serve as a pollinizer for all other varieties.

### DWARF CHERRY TREES

Most gardeners complain of cherry trees growing too tall so that only the birds can get the fruit. Nurseries frequently offer “semi-dwarf” cherries to overcome this problem. In most cases these trees are produced by budding or grafting the variety to a Mahaleb rootstock. This rootstock is well-adapted to arid areas but not to the heavier, wetter soils of western Washington. In addition, it does not produce much reduction in tree size. In western Washington it is best to have trees grown on sweet cherry seedling or the canker-resistant type known as Mazzard F-12-1. Even though this rootstock results in a large tree, much can be done in early training and pruning to keep the tree bearing closer to the ground.

Recently, the same breeder who developed the self-fruitful Stella was able to produce true dwarf cherries by radiation. Compact Stella and Compact Lambert have been introduced and will gradually become more available. A California nursery has introduced Garden Bing, another genetic dwarf. At last we can now have trees small enough to be easily netted from the birds, and even a few varieties which may not even need a pollinizer.

### CROSS-POLLINATION

All sweet cherries except Stella and Compact Stella require another variety for cross-pollination. Red, tart cherries, e.g., Montmorency, are self-fruitful but will not usually pollinize sweet cherries well because they bloom too late.

Royal Ann, Bing, and Lambert will not pollinize each other, nor will Venus and Van. All other varieties in the listing above will pollinize all others in the list except as noted. It is best to have three different varieties in the same area to ensure adequate pollination. If you don’t have adequate pollination, try placing flowering branches in a can of water hung in the tree.

In western Washington, cherries often drop excessively when about half grown. The cause of this condition is not fully known. Lack of pollination usually causes an early drop of unfertilized fruits. The later drop of apparently normal fruits may be caused by an abortion of the embryo (seed) as a result of cold weather. There is no known control for this condition.
SOURCES OF SWEET CHERRY VARIETIES FOR WESTERN WASHINGTON

Although your local nursery or garden center usually is the best place to obtain fruit tree stock since you can judge the quality before buying, it is sometimes difficult to find new or unusual varieties. The following list indicates retail nurseries capable of supplying trees by mail. When purchasing a cherry tree, specify the desired rootstock. Best for most of western Washington would be the Mazzard F-12-1. It is resistant to bacterial canker, one of our most destructive diseases. Next would be Sweet Cherry seedling, also called Mazzard. Avoid cherry trees labeled “Semi-dwarf” or “Mahaleb” unless you are planting the tree in a very well-drained, sandy site. This rootstock is not adapted to heavy soils and can cause the tree to die prematurely.

This listing of retail nurseries does not constitute an endorsement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Possible Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Burlat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
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<td>Rainier</td>
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<td>Sam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venus</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source list:
1. C & O Nursery, P.O. Box 116, Wenatchee, WA 98801
2. N.Y. State Fruit Testing, Geneva, NY 14456
3. Stark Bros., Louisiana, MO 63353
4. Van Well Nursery, P.O. Box 1339, Wenatchee, WA 98801
