

Bush Cherries (*Prunus* spp.)



Exposure: Full sun to part shade, zone 2 - 7.

Soil: All cherries require well-drained soil. Bush cherries are tolerant of different soil types.

Growth habits:

- **Nanking cherry (*Prunus tomentosa*):** A multiple-stemmed bush cherry from 6 to 10 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide. Beautiful, slightly fuzzy foliage and beautiful dark reddish bark for winter interest. Whitish-pink cherry flowers in March followed by delicious small bright red cherries in late May to early June.
- **Korean bush cherry (*Prunus japonica*):** A fine-textured bush cherry with fuzzy leaves that grows to 5 to 8 feet in height and width.
- **Fall-ripening bush cherry (*Prunus japonica* x *jacquemontii*):** A small, shrubby, fine-textured bush cherry that grows to 5 feet in height and width.

Landscape uses: Hedge, specimen, orchard, or foundation planting. All are attractive to bees and other pollinators, and make good wildlife habitat.

Edible/Medicinal properties:

- **Nanking cherry:** The small sweet/tart, juicy red cherries are the first bush fruit of the season to ripen and are quite tasty for fresh eating or processing. We love this fruit and are always excited when they begin to ripen up. You'll have to race your wildlife for these tasty beauties.
- **Korean bush cherry:** These bush cherries produce average-sized, bright red cherries in mid summer. The cherries are similar to Nanking cherries, but sweeter. Less productive than Nanking cherry. The cherries are great for fresh eating and can be frozen for delicious winter snacks. They also make tasty juice and are high in anthocyanins and other antioxidants.
- **Fall-ripening bush cherry:** These delightful bush cherries produce average-sized, bright red cherries in August. This offers growers a second season of cherry yields and the late-ripening cherries don't seem to be bothered by bird predation during their season of ripening.

Pollination:

- **Nanking cherry:** Two plants required for pollination. Can be pollinated by plums that flower at the same time.
- **Korean bush cherry:** Self fertile. Two plants increase fruiting.
- **Fall-ripening bush cherry:** Two varieties required for pollination. Although their names are 'Jan', 'Joel', and 'Joy', they don't have gender, so any two will pollinate each other.

Caring for your bush cherries

Pruning: In the late winter when the heavy freezes are over, prune away any damaged or diseased limbs, and crossing branches. In the summer, after fruiting, you can also prune to shape the plant. The UPN videos on pruning blueberry shrubs also apply to pruning bush cherries.

Watering: The plant will likely need to be watered once a week if there isn't enough rain.

Fertilization: Apply a good general purpose fertilizer in April and June.

Frequently asked questions about bush cherries

What's that white fuzzy stuff on the leaves?

Bush cherries are susceptible to downy mildew. You can either let it be, knowing that it will disappear when the weather is drier, or spray with Organocide, an OMRI-approved fungicide.

What are the cherries like?

The cherries taste really good - we enjoy eating them right off the plant. They are smaller than cherries that grow on trees - a pie would be tasty, but a labor of love. They can be juiced for making juices and jellies, if you don't eat them all fresh first!

Should I get a cherry tree or bush cherry?

We like bush cherries better than cherry trees in our climate. They are hardier, less susceptible to disease, and their cherries are within reach, even for kids!

What else is great about bush cherries?

They have soft, fuzzy leaves, especially the new leaves in the spring. Even the new stems are fuzzy!

What else?

They need 6 hours of sun to fruit, just like other plants. However, since Nanking cherries and Korean bush cherries fruit so early, you can plant them under canopy trees that leaf out later! Chuck has his planted between a couple oak trees. You might lose some productivity, but you can still get fruit from an area that would otherwise be too shady.

How far apart should I plant them?

They are pollinated by bees and other flying insects, so anywhere from 6 to 30 feet is good.

Additional information

See the Useful Plants Nursery website at www.usefulplants.org for videos demonstrating planting and other plant care techniques.