

No lie!

You can grow cherry trees in Wyoming, just be selective!



Vicki Hayman and Chris Hilgert

Wyoming gardeners know selecting the right plant variety is key to success no matter what we grow. Some of the most popular sweet cherries like Bing and Rainier won't grow here, but fortunately there are some cherries we can enjoy.

Most of us are familiar with cherry "trees" with their beautiful spring flowers and delicious fruit.

One of the most common cherry tree varieties is Montmorency (*Prunus cerasus* 'Montmorency'), a pie (sour) cherry that grows throughout much of the state and can produce reliable and plentiful yields.

While Montmorency is considered one of the best cherries for making pies, gardeners will also enjoy this as a spring-flowering ornamental tree in landscapes. You will want to plant several, but this tree is self-fertile, so

it only takes one tree to produce baskets full of wonderful fruit. The tree grows to about 20 feet tall and wide, is extremely winter hardy (USDA hardiness zone 4), and is a heavy producer of cherries.

Bush cherries are other good options for Wyoming gardeners looking for ornamental and food producing plants in backyards. Two bush-type cherries are Nanking (*Prunus tomentosa*) and western sandcherry (*Prunus*

besseyi). Both are extremely cold hardy, drought tolerant, and adaptable to a wide range of soil types. They also flower in the spring and produce edible, but relatively small, cherries in summer.

Nanking can grow 6-10 feet tall, spreads to 15 feet wide at maturity, and grows best in full sun.

Western sandcherry grows to 3-6 feet tall and wide and does best in full sun. The taste of the fruit varies by plant. Some have good tasting berries, which make a great plum-tasting jam, and others have an astringent taste you may or may not like.

If you have the chance to taste the berries from plants of the same source, do so before buying. Plant these cherries for their fruit, but enjoy them in your landscape as a hedge, border planting, and to attract wildlife.

Birds, deer, and other creatures visiting backyards will be drawn to these plants as a food source. Netting, fencing, and other deterrents will protect these prized cherries, unless you don't mind sharing.

Nutrition and Health Benefits of Cherries

Cherries are a rich source of fiber and full of nutrients, including antioxidants, potassium, vitamins C and B complex, and other compounds that fight heart disease and cancer, reduce inflammation, and help with bone health. There are about 90 calories in a cup of fresh cherries.

Choosing the Best Cherry

When selecting cherries, look for firm, large fruit with stems intact. They should be brightly colored in shades of red, pink, or golden yellows with shiny skins. Reject undersized,

wrinkled, or too soft cherries. Avoid fruit that is bruised or has cuts through the surface. If possible, taste the cherries.

Storing Cherries for Freshness

Store unwashed cherries in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Cherries will keep for about a week, but it's better to store small amounts and eat them within a day or two.

Check the fruit occasionally and remove the cherries that have gone bad. Spoiled cherries will cause the others to decay. Wash the cherries before using.

Save the sweet taste of summer cherries for later in the year by freezing them. While they won't have the same texture as fresh cherries after they've been frozen, they are great for cooking or baking.



SOUR CHERRY COMPOTE

Sour cherry compote is a perfect use for summer's sour cherries. Use as a topping for crepes, pancakes, waffles, cheese cake, yogurt, ice cream, or cake.

Servings: 2 cups

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract or paste
- 2 cups sour cherries, pitted

1. Combine sugar, water, cornstarch, lemon juice, and vanilla in heavy medium saucepan. Bring to boil over high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Boil until thin syrup forms.
2. Reduce heat to medium; add cherries. Stir 1 minute.
3. Let cool and enjoy.

Preparing Cherries

The taste of sweet or tart cherries can be one of summer's greatest treats! The challenge is removing the pits. If just eating cherries, you can simply spit out the pits; however, if you're cooking with them, pit them in advance. Use one of the following methods; you might want to wear gloves to prevent red-stained hands!

Method #1: Scooping out the pit – Remove the stem of the cherry. Puncture the curved end of a paperclip or a hairpin into the stem area of the cherry. Push it down to locate the pit and then move the paperclip around the pit in a circular motion. Pop the pit out.

Method #2: Pushing out the pit – Place the cherry on its side into the

open part of a pitter. Press the clamp and then release it to remove the pit. Another method is to place the cherry sideways on the opening of a bottle. Take the pointy end of a chopstick, orange stick, or end of a straw, and push the cherry pit through the other side and into the bottle.

Method #3: Squeeze out the pit – Gently squeeze the pit with your thumb and forefinger from the center of the cherry out of the bottom. A knife may be used to slice an "X" into ends of cherries before squeezing.

Method #4: Cut out the pit– Slice the cherries in half with a paring knife and use the tip of the knife to remove the pit.

Method #5: Smash out the pit – Lightly smash the side of the cherry

under the broad side of a chef's knife or mallet so the skin splits enough to remove the pits.

No matter which cherry pitting method used, it can lead to the creation of tasty recipes with fresh cherries this summer!

For current research-based recommendations for home food preservation, refer to these publications:

- Information on freezing or canning cherries, see the bulletin *Preserving Food in Wyoming – Fruit* at bit.ly/canningwyoming
- To make cherry jam and jelly see the National Center for Home Food Preservation website at bit.ly/preservingfood

Vicki Hayman could tell George Washington a thing or two about cherry desserts, and **Chris Hilgert** could instruct him about cherry trees. Hayman is a University of Wyoming Extension nutrition and food safety educator based in Weston County and can be reached at (307) 746-3531 or at vhayman@uwyo.edu. Hilgert is the Master Gardener state coordinator with UW Extension and is at (307) 766-6870 or chilgert@uwyo.edu.

