



Swan River Gardens

How to Grow Cherries



Want to know a little secret? You can grow a pretty good sweet cherry even if you don't live on the balmy shores of Flathead Lake. And pie cherries? Pfffft. Go for it and don't look back. Now we at Swan River Gardens don't mean to suggest that you can grow the exact same varieties of cherries as the fine East Shore orchards do but you can grow a pretty darn good one.

Selecting Your Cherry Trees: Cherry trees can be both self fertile or require another tree for pollination. Unfortunately they can also be fussy about just who they are paired with. The experts at Swan River Gardens select varieties that work well together and can help you make correct pairings. Pie cherries can be used to pollinate sweet cherries here in Montana because their bloom times tend to overlap considerably.

Sweet or Pie cherries can be a great choice for use as an ornamental tree in the yard. They take pruning to shape very well and produce clouds of blossoms in early summer.

Cherry Varieties

Sweet Cherries:

Stella: Self fertile, needs no other tree. A good sweet red cherry. Zone 4.

Lapin: Self fertile, one that is grown in the orchards, a good commercial cherry, resists splitting. Zone 4.

Bing: An old favorite, dark and sweet. Pollinate with Stella or Rainer. Zone 5.

Rainer: (yellow): A sweet yellow tinged with red. Good for fresh eating. Excellent pollinator with Bing. Zone 4.

Semi Sweet Cherries:

Bali: A relatively new introduction, super hardy to Zone 3. Flavor is semi-sweet, slight hint of tartness. Good for both fresh eating and cooking. Bali has now been widely sold throughout Montana and survived the worst winters in many areas of the state. Slightly smaller fruit than a typical sweet cherry on a naturally semi dwarf tree that typically reaches only 8' high and wide. Self fertile, good for small yards.

Pie Cherries:

Montmorency: A classic tart red cherry for pies and pastries. Self fertile, can also be used to pollinate sweet cherries such as Bing. Grows 18-20' high and wide but can be pruned shorter and to shape. Zone 4.

Caring For Your Cherry Trees: Be sure to pick up the Swan River Gardens handout on Fruit Trees for general information on growing fruit trees. There is one specific thing to note about cherries. Because they blossom at a time of year in Montana when cold snaps can happen without much warning it is not unusual for cherry trees growers to suffer a season when a cold night at the wrong time damages the fruit producing buds. The trees themselves survive this setback but will not produce fruit that season. Cherries are one of the first fruits ready for harvest each season so they are perfect for the first taste of summer each year.