



# CHERRIES AND PLUMS *The Important Distinctions*

	<b>Pin Cherry</b> <i>Prunus pennsylvanica</i>	<b>Black Cherry</b> <i>Prunus serotina</i>	<b>Common Chokecherry</b> <i>Prunus virginiana</i>	<b>Canada Plum</b> <i>Prunus nigra</i>
<b>BARK</b>				
<b>TEXTURE</b>	Nearly smooth. Large horizontal lenticels show orange when rubbed.	Young trunks: prominent white lenticels. Older trunks: fissured and ridged.	Smooth with a pungent, disagreeable odor. Lenticels less prominent than on other <i>Prunus</i> species.	Lenticels yellowish
<b>COLOR</b>	Reddish-brown	Young trunks are black	Grayish-brown, with light-colored fissures	Dull reddish-brown to black
<b>LEAVES</b>				
<b>GENERAL DESCRIPTION</b>	Long and tapering from base to tip. Widest in the lower 1/3; thin and firm textured with round teeth. Glands on stalk, and no hairs on midribs.	Elliptic/oblong, widest in the center, thick leathery and shiny. Underside of midrib near stalk end covered with rusty, brown hairs. Glands on stalk near blade. Margin has rounded teeth.	Obovate, widest in the terminal 1/3, sharply saw-toothed and without hairs, medium leathery in texture, glands on stalk and no brown hairs on midrib.	Ovate or obovate tapering abruptly into a long thin point. Teeth rounded. Glands on stalk.
<b>TWIGS</b>				
<b>SHAPE</b>	Very fine	Waxy	Medium slender	Thorns common on older twigs
<b>COLOR</b>	Red and reddish-brown	Red-brown with a lighter or greenish margin	Gray or purplish-brown	Current growth gray, older growth darkening to black
<b>ODOR</b>	Slight cherry odor	Sharp, pungent smell when broken	Strong, pungent bitter-almond odor	None
<b>BUDS</b>				
<b>SHAPE</b>	Football-shaped with a longitudinal furrow	Ovate, flattened	Cone shaped, slender—pointed, side buds not flattened	Cone shaped, pointed
<b>COLOR</b>	Red-brown	Red-brown with a lighter or greenish margin	Purple to tan pattern	Gray-brown
<b>FRUIT</b>				
<b>COLOR</b>	Bright Red	Black	Deep red to purple	Light red to yellow
<b>SIZE</b>	1/4 inch diameter	1/2 inch diameter	1/4–1/2 inch diameter	1 inch diameter
<b>ARRANGEMENT</b>	Hang in umbellate or corymbose clusters	Produced in a raceme, the individual fruit have a persistent basal disc	Produced in racemes, basal disc not persistent	Football-shaped with a longitudinal furrow

The twigs and branches of cherry and plum trees may be distorted by the 'black knot' fungus (*Dibotryon morbosum* (Schw.) Th. & Syd.).





## PIN CHERRY *Prunus pensylvanica* L. f.



*Pin cherry is not used commercially and has little value except as a protection and cover for the soil on recent clearings or burned areas.*

**P**in or fire cherry is a small tree, seldom growing taller than 25–30 feet in height and 6–10 inches in diameter. It has slender, horizontal branches and a narrow, somewhat rounded head. It is common throughout the state, but has little value except as a protection and cover for the soil on recent clearings or burned areas.

The **bark** on the trunk of old trees is dark red-brown and broken into thin plates. Bark on young trees is smooth and reddish-brown. The inner bark is slightly aromatic and very bitter. The large lenticels show orange when rubbed.

The **leaves** are alternate, narrow to oblong, widest in the lower third, rather sharp pointed, finely and sharply toothed on the edges, bright green and shiny above, without hairs below, 3–4 inches long, bitter and aromatic, with glands on petiole.

The **flowers** are white, in clusters of four or five, and appear in May when the leaves are only half grown. The **fruit** is bright red, almost translu-





cent, pea-sized, globular and ripens from the first of July to August. In the past, it was used to make jams and jellies.

The **twigs** are shiny, reddish-brown and very slender. The buds are small, ovoid, reddish-brown and clustered at the end of twigs. They are commonly distorted by a black, warty, fungus growth called “black knot.”

The **wood** is coarse-grained, soft and light. It is not used commercially. The gum is edible.

*Pin cherry produces abundant 5-petaled flowers every spring.*





## BLACK CHERRY *Prunus serotina* Ehrh.



**B**lack cherry is widely distributed throughout the state. In some parts of the country it is an extremely valuable timber tree, but in Maine does not often grow to sufficient size. It grows on a variety of soils, but makes rapid and best growth on rich, moist land. It has a narrow head, small horizontal branches, and attains a height of 40–50 feet and a diameter of 10–20 inches.

The **bark** on the trunk of young trees is red-brown to black and rather

*Black cherry is one of our most valuable timber trees, although not abundant in sufficient size.*





shiny with prominent white lenticels. On older trees, the bark is broken into small irregular plates.

The **leaves** are alternate, elliptic, oblong, widest at the center, finely toothed, dark green, shiny, thick, somewhat leathery and 2–5 inches long. The underside of the midrib near the stalk end is covered with rusty brown hairs.

The **flowers** are produced in many flowered racemes 4–5 inches long that appear at the end of May or in early June when the leaves are half-grown. The **fruit** is in drooping racemes, dark purple or almost black when ripe, 1/4–1/2 inch in diameter, and globular in shape. It ripens from June to October and is an important wildlife food.

The **twigs** give off a pungent odor when broken, and the bark has a bitter taste. As with pin cherry, twigs and branches are commonly distorted by a black, warty, fungus growth called “black knot.”

The **wood** is rather hard, close-grained, light, strong and easily polished. It is used for furniture and cabinetmaking, interior finishing, woodenware, veneer and plywood. It is valued as firewood due to its high heat value and fragrance.



*The rusty hairs along the midvein on the back of the leaf distinguish black cherry.*



*Black cherry twigs have a bitter taste and give off a pungent odor when broken.*

**MAINE REGISTER OF BIG TREES 2008**  
**Black Cherry**  
**Circumference:** 148"  
**Height:** 52'  
**Crown Spread:** 60'  
**Location:** Falmouth





## COMMON CHOKECHERRY

*Prunus virginiana* L.



*Common chokecherry wood is heavy and hard, but not strong, and is not used commercially.*

**C**ommon chokecherry is a shrub or small tree that occurs throughout the state, especially along fencerows in farming communities. It occasionally is 25 feet high and 6 inches in diameter.

The smooth, grayish-brown to black **bark** is usually marked by long, light-colored fissures and has a disagreeable scent.

The **leaves** are alternate, dull, widest at the terminal one-third, 2–4 inches long, finely-toothed, medium-leathery in texture and at maturity are without hairs.

The **flowers** appear from the first of May to June on slender stalks in racemes.





*Chokecherry twigs have cone-shaped buds and give off a strong odor when broken.*

The **fruit** ripens from July to September, and is about 1/4–1/3 inch in diameter, at first bright red, turning at maturity to dark red or nearly black. It is slightly astringent, but edible.

The **winter buds** are strictly cone-shaped, slender and pointed with a definite purple and tan pattern on the scales. Side buds are not flattened as in black cherry.

The **twigs** have a strong, pungent, skunk-like odor when broken and, as with pin cherry and black cherry, are

frequently distorted by a black, warty, fungus growth called “black knot.”

The **wood** is heavy, hard but not strong, and is not used commercially.





*The Canada plum's fruit, which ripens in the latter part of August, is edible.*

## CANADA PLUM *Prunus nigra* Ait.

Canada or red plum, has been planted as an ornamental and is found occasionally throughout much of the state. It does not occur in densely forested areas; rather it usually occurs in thickets along field edges. It is seldom over 8 inches in diameter and 30 feet high. The twigs and branches of cherry and plum trees are distorted by the

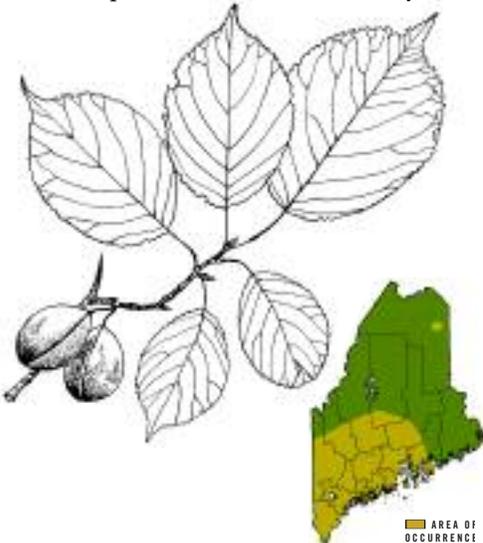
black knot fungus, *Apiosporina morbosa*.

The **bark** is thin, dull reddish-brown to black; it peels in thin papery scales, exposing the shiny reddish-brown, inner bark.

The **leaves** are alternate, obovate, and taper at the apex to a long, sharp point. Leaves are dark green on the upper surface, lighter below; the margin has glandular, rounded teeth.

The **flowers** are white, and appear early in spring before the leaves in groups of three or four on slender stalks. The edible **fruit** ripens the latter part of August, is football-shaped and furrowed along one side, and has an orange-red skin and yellow flesh. The single stone is flattened and slightly grooved on the edges.

The **twigs** and **branches** often have thorns. The buds are brown to gray and are without hairs. The **wood** is not used commercially.



AREA OF OCCURRENCE

