



***Prunus serotina***

**Black Cherry, Wild Black Cherry,  
Mountain Black Cherry, Rum Cherry**

Rosaceae (Rose Family)

Blooming season: May- June

Plant: Branched perennial, 12-15 meters, 40-50 feet high and 20-91cm, 8-36 inches in trunk diameter; branches few, large tortuous, forming a rather spreading, oblong or rounded crown.

Leaves: Leaves are alternate, simple, ovate to oblong-lanceolate, 5-15 cm long, 2.5-5 cm wide, with finely toothed margins, glabrous or commonly with reddish hairs along the midrib beneath, near the base.

Bark: Bark on young trunks red-brown, smooth, with conspicuous, whitish, horizontal lenticels, the outer layer peeling off in strips transversely, becoming thin, almost black, and broken into scaly plates with age. Inner bark of twigs is bitter. Black Cherry can be distinguished from other types of cherry trees by the bark. Choke Cherry's bark is dark brown and slightly fissured. Pin Cherry, or Wild Red Cherry, has orange colored lenticels which become brown and peels horizontally into broad papery plates.

Flower: Perfect; ¼ inch across; borne on slender pedicels in many-flowered, loose racemes, 10-13 cm, 4-5 inches long; calyx cup-shaped, 5-lobed; petals 5, white; stamens 15-20; stigma thick club-shaped

Fruit: August- September. A globular drupe, 2-2.5 cm, 1/3 to ½ inch in diameter, nearly black with a dark purple, juicy flesh; slightly bitter, edible.

Geographic range: Widespread in eastern North America, from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec, Canada, Minnesota and North Dakota, southward to Florida and east Texas, with outlying populations in central Texas, west Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, and south in Mexico to



# Kasey Hartz Natural Area Reference Sheet



## *Prunus serotina*

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**2**

Guatemala. Known to be highly invasive in forests of Holland and other countries of Western Europe; also naturalized in northern South America. Frequent in the southern half of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, rare in the northern half and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Habitat: Prefers a rich, moist soil, but grows well on dry, gravelly or sandy soils.

Common local companions: White, Red, and Black Oak, White Pine.

### Usages:

**Human**: Used to make cabinets and furniture as well as paneling, interior trim, veneers, handles, crafts, toys, and scientific instruments. Black cherry is used for reclamation of surface mine spoil. Humans use the fruit for flavoring of rum and brandy as well as for eating. Medicinal uses are as a “cough suppressant; [which is] useful for dry, irritant or nervous coughs” (Ody, 1993), as a tonic, and also as a sedative. “Many people claim to stave off gout attacks by eating eight ounces a day of canned or fresh cherries” (Duke, 1997), although this has not been shown by research. The glycoside derivatives which are found in the bark act by quelling spasms in the smooth muscles lining bronchioles, although caution should be used as very large amounts of black cherry pose the theoretical risk of causing cyanide poisoning.

**Animal**: Animals such as passerine birds, game birds, and mammals, including the red fox, black bear, raccoon, opossum, squirrels, and rabbits eat the fruit.

Why is it called *that*? Black cherry is named for the black color of the fruit when ripe.

Prepared by: Hope Buell October 2010

### Works Cited

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\* Used as a main source of information.