

Choke-cherry (*Prunus virginiana*)

What is Choke-cherry?

Choke-cherry is a small shrubby tree related to the commercial cherries grown in orchards. Its flowers and fruit are borne in bunches, making picking quite easy in late summer.

What are its uses?

While Choke-cherries are eaten by many birds and small mammals, people find that the berries in their uncooked form can be quite sour. **Note:** The bark, leaves and seeds of all Cherry species contain cyanide-producing compounds. These are destroyed by cooking, so the jams, jellies and pies are quite safe - and delicious. Such gourmet foods are on the market in other parts of Canada and in New England.

Traditionally, this plant also had medicinal uses, but because of the cyanide problem it should be treated with caution!

Where is it found?

Growing along trails, fence-lines, wood edges and other open disturbed areas, Choke-cherry is often found with its relative Pin Cherry (*Prunus pensylvanica*). While Pin Cherry fruit may be used for the same purposes, it is harder to pick because the berries are scattered on the shrub.

What are the issues?

Sustainability: Pin Cherry and Choke-cherry are quite common and reproduce rapidly so there are no problem with sustainability. The biggest difficulty is to beat the birds to the picking!

Outdoor Etiquette: Few forest boundaries are well marked and few landowners regularly inspect their woodlands. Harvesters could cross boundaries inadvertently or deliberately. Follow rules of outdoor etiquette: If you take it in - take it out! Carry a compass and know how to use it!

Cultivation: These species can be cultivated but the fungal disease, Black Knot, can be a problem.

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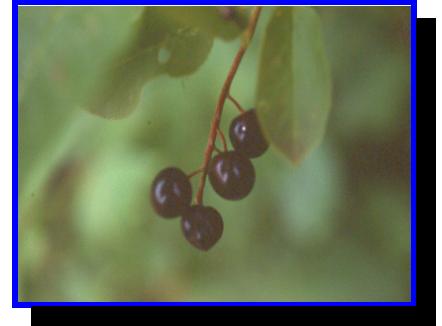


Figure 1. Choke-cherries grow in small clusters, making picking easier.
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Figure 2. Choke-cherry leaves are egg-shaped and 2- 4 inches long.