

## Ornamental Cherry, Plum, Apricot & Almond

Ornamental flowering fruit trees (*Prunus* species) are closely related to the orchard fruit trees that are grown primarily for their fruit. Although many of the ornamental flowering trees bear edible fruit, they are grown primarily for their springtime floral display and attractive form.

Although the flowering cherry is probably the most recognized ornamental flowering tree in South Carolina, there are others, including flowering plum, apricot and almond. Many are adapted to the entire state, while others will not grow along the coast. Some only thrive in the mountainous regions.

### Japanese Flowering Cherry, Oriental Cherry (*Prunus serrulata*)

**Mature Height/Spread:** The Japanese cherry will grow 15 to 25 feet tall and 15 to 25 feet wide. Depending on the cultivar, it may have an upright form, wide spreading form with horizontal branching or weeping form.

**Growth Rate:** It may grow about 10 feet in 10 years, but is short-lived. The average life span is 15 to 20 years.

**Ornamental Features:** Bloom occurs from early-to mid-spring, depending on the cultivar. The showy flowers may be white or pink, single or double; some are fragrant. Double-flowered varieties tend to hold their bloom longer. Flowers occur before or with the leaves. The new leaves are often bronze when unfolding, turning deep green in summer. Fall color is often bronze to yellow-orange in fall. Fruit are seldom produced.

**Landscape Use:** Flowering cherries are mainly used as lawn specimens, street trees and in groupings. Wide, spreading trees work well as shade trees, while smaller ones enhance a small garden area.

They prefer moist, fast-draining, well-aerated soil and require full sun. Pruning is seldom necessary except to remove dead or diseased wood, or crossing branches that appear awkward or rub against each other. To avoid reducing the following year's flower display, prune crossing or rubbing branches immediately after flowering. Prune dead or diseased wood any time of year.

**Problems:** Flowering cherries are susceptible to many problems, including cherry virus diseases, canker, twig blight, root rot, powdery mildew, bacterial and fungal leaf spots, borers, aphids, tent caterpillar, and scale. Bark is thin and easily damaged by mowers and string trimmers. Reduce chances of disease and insects by keeping trees healthy with irrigation in extended drought and regular fertilizer applications.

### Cultivars & Varieties:

- 'Amanogawa' ('Erecta') - Grows 20 feet tall with a narrow columnar habit. Grows best in the Upstate. Semi-double, light pink, fragrant flowers in midseason.
- 'Kwanzan' - Upright spreading form, 30 feet tall and 20 feet wide. Not a good selection for coastal areas. Showy, unscented, double pink flowers in mid-season. Most common cultivar; planted with Yoshino cherry in Washington, D.C. for the Cherry Blossom Festival.
- 'Shirofugen' - Fast-grower, wide-spreading habit, 25 feet tall and wide. Grows best in the Upstate. Double, white, unscented flowers in late season.
- 'Shirotae' ('Mt. Fuji') - Wide-spreading habit, 20 feet tall with wider spread. Not a good selection for coastal areas. Semi-double, pink, fragrant flowers in early season.

- 'Shogetsu'('Shimidsu') - Wide-spreading habit, 15 feet tall with wider spread. Not a good selection for coastal areas. Double, pale pink flowers in late season.

### Higan Cherry (*P. subhirtella*)

**Mature Height/Spread:** The Higan cherry will grow 20 to 40 feet tall and 15 to 30 feet wide. The habit may be upright-spreading, rounded or weeping, depending on the cultivar.

**Growth Rate:** Some of the most heat, cold and stress tolerant of all the cherries, they are longer-lived than most.

**Ornamental Features:** Bloom occurs from early to midspring, depending on the cultivar. The showy flowers are white or pale to deep pink, single or double, and appear before or with the leaves. In summer, leaves are dark green, turning yellowish in the fall.

**Landscape Use:** Higan cherries are mainly used as lawn specimens, street trees and in groupings. Wide-spreading and weeping cultivars make good shade trees.

They prefer moist, fast-draining, well-aerated soil, and require full sun. Pruning is seldom necessary except to remove dead or diseased wood, or crossing branches that appear awkward or rub against each other. To avoid reducing the following year's flower display, prune crossing or rubbing branches immediately after flowering. Prune dead or diseased wood any time of year.



Autumn flowering cherry (*Prunus subhirtella* 'Autumnalis')  
Jack Scheper ©2004 Floridata.com

**Problems:** This species is not as seriously affected by diseases and insects as some other Asian cherries. It is more prone to problems, however, in dry soil. Irrigate during drought conditions. Problems include borers, scale, aphids, leaf spot and twig cankers. Leaf loss can be severe when weather conditions favor disease development.

### Cultivars & Varieties:

- 'Autumnalis' - Multiple trunks, upright branches and a rounded canopy, often growing wider than tall. Pinkish white double flowers cover the tree in early spring; flowers may also appear in autumn when warm. Grows quickly when young; slows down with age. Not suited to Coastal Plains.
- 'Pendula' (Weeping Higan Cherry) - Graceful, weeping habit makes this tree a striking specimen in a large-scale landscape. Pink or white single flowers cover branches in early spring. Buy this tree in flower to be sure of flower color. Not well-suited to Coastal Plains.

### Yoshino Cherry (*P. x yedoensis*)

The Yoshino cherry, along with the Japanese cherry tree, dominates the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. during the Cherry Blossom Festival.

**Mature Height/Spread:** The Yoshino cherry can grow 40 to 50 feet tall and wide, but is usually smaller. Most have a rounded, spreading growth habit; some cultivars have weeping forms.

**Growth Rate:** Although they grow quickly to 20 feet, they are relatively short-lived (15 to 20 years).

**Ornamental Features:** Bloom occurs in early spring, before the leaves develop. Showy flowers are white to pink, single or double, and slightly fragrant. Flowers can be damaged by late frosts or very windy conditions. Leaves are dark green, turning yellowish in the fall.

**Landscape Use:** This tree may be used as a small shade tree, lawn specimen, near a deck or patio or as a street tree, if irrigation is available.

It prefers moist, fast-draining, well-aerated acidic soil, and requires full sun. Keep roots moist; this tree is not tolerant of prolonged drought. It does

tolerate heat and humidity. Pruning is seldom necessary except to remove dead or diseased wood, or crossing branches that appear awkward or rub against each other. To avoid reducing the following year's flower display, prune crossing or rubbing branches immediately after flowering. Prune dead or diseased wood any time of year.

**Problems:** Problems that affect this tree include aphids, borers, scales and mites.

#### Cultivars:

- 'Akebono' ('Daybreak') - Grows 25 feet tall and wide with a rounded, spreading growth habit. Soft pink flowers bloom in early spring. Grows quickly in youth. Not well-suited for Coastal Plains.
- 'Shidare Yoshino' - A weeping, white-flowered selection. Often called Weeping Yoshino Cherry.



Yoshino Cherry 'Daybreak' (*Prunus x yeddensis* 'Daybreak')  
'Akebono' Yoshino Cherry  
Jack Scheper ©2003 Floridata.com

#### Other Species

**American Plum (*P. americana*):** American plum (wild plum, goose plum) grows along roadsides. It may be in shrub form, often spreading to form colonies or thickets, or it may be a single stemmed tree, growing 15 to 25 feet tall. The flowers are white, appearing before the leaves. Fruits are yellow to red, and are good for making jelly. It is not usually found in the Coastal Plains.

**Chickasaw Plum (*P. angustifolia*):** Chickasaw plum is a shrub that spreads to form colonies or thickets, similar to *P. americana*. Branches are thorny. White flowers appear in early spring. Fruits

are prized by wildlife. This shrub is adapted to all of South Carolina.

**Taiwan Cherry (*P. campanulata*):** This small, slender tree grows 20 to 25 feet tall and spreads nearly as wide as it matures. The bright pink flowers are some of the first to appear in late winter. Buds or flowers may be injured by frost if they are too far open. This tree is adapted to all of South Carolina and is a good choice for the Coastal Plains.

**Cherry Plum (*P. cerasifera*):** The species is not widely grown, but a few purple-leaved cultivars are popular. Plums are not as particular about soil as flowering cherries, but will not tolerate waterlogged soils for long periods. They require little pruning.

- 'Atropurpurea' - Fast-growing tree grows 25 to 30 feet tall. Light pink flowers appear before the leaves in spring. New leaves are ruby-red, turn dark reddish purple and finally become greenish bronze in late summer. Produces edible fruit. Not well-suited to the Coastal Plains.
- 'Thundercloud' - Popular purple-leaved plum that grows 20 feet tall and wide. Fragrant, single, pink flowers appear before the leaves. Leaves remain deep purple through the growing season. Occasionally produces fruit. Not well-suited to the Coastal Plains.

**Dwarf Flowering Almond (*P. glandulosa*):** The dwarf flowering almond is a spreading, multi-stemmed shrub that grows 4 to 5 feet tall and 3 to 4 feet wide. Its chief value is in the showy flower, which is either white or pink, single or double, and appears in midspring on old wood. It is often straggly and weak-stemmed, and subject to several insect and disease problems, especially borers. When damaged, prune to the ground in spring after flowering. It will return but will probably not flower for a year.

**Mexican Plum (*P. mexicana*):** Mexican plum has a delicate, spreading form, growing 15 to 25 feet tall. It is single-trunked and does not spread and form thickets like chickasaw plum and American plum. Fragrant, white flowers appear in early spring. Fruits are good for making jelly. While seldom used in landscape planting, it may be saved in naturalized areas. This tree is adapted to all of South Carolina.

**Japanese Flowering Apricot (*P. mume*):** The flowering apricot is a fast-growing tree when young, averaging 3 to 5 feet per year. Growth slows when the plant is about 10 to 12 years old. It grows 20 to 30 feet tall, and the growth habit may be rounded, upright, weeping, or corkscrew, depending on the cultivar. It prefers full sun, and fertile, well-drained, acid soils. The single or double flowers may be white, pink, rose or red, depending on the cultivar. They appear on old wood from Christmas to March, and have a strong and spicy-sweet fragrance. Sudden freezes following warm weather can kill open flowers and expanded buds. The yellow fruit is not edible.



Karen Russ, ©HGIC, Clemson Extension

'Rosemary Clarke' Japanese Flowering Apricot  
Karen Russ, ©HGIC, Clemson Extension

- 'Dawn' - Large ruffled double pink flowers; slightly later than other cultivars.
- 'Peggy Clarke' - Showy, double deep rose flowers with long golden stamens in the center.
- 'Rosemary Clarke' - Double white flowers. Early bloomer.
- 'W.B. Clarke' - Double pink flowers. Weeping form.

**Purple-leaf Sand Cherry (*P. x cistena*):** This small, delicate tree grows 7 to 10 feet tall with a slightly smaller spread. The single, pinkish flowers are fragrant and appear after the leaves in mid- to late spring. Leaves are reddish purple through the summer.



'Okame' Cherry  
Jack Scheper ©2004 Floridata.com

**'Okame' Cherry (*P. x incamp* 'Okame')**: This hybrid (*P. incisa* and *P. campanulata*) grows quickly when young, forming an upright, vase-shaped tree that becomes more rounded with age. It grows 20 to 30 feet tall and wide. The rich pink flowers appear before the leaves in early spring. Dark green leaves turn to yellow-orange or orange-red in autumn. The bark is shiny and reddish-brown. It grows in all types of soils and needs full sun, although it prefers filtered sun in the afternoon in the southern part of the state. Although somewhat tolerant of drought, it benefits from irrigation in dry weather. This tree blooms well even in the Coastal Plains.

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