



CHERRY TREES

Site planning

As with most fruit trees, cherry trees produce best when planted in full sun with well-drained soil. Sweet cherries especially struggle in heavy clay soil and sitting in wet soil leads to root rot disease-sour type cherries are more adaptive to different soil types. Plant in a location with good air circulation so leaves dry quickly after a rainfall, to minimize the risk of fungal diseases. The ideal soil PH is 6 - 7. When choosing a location, consider the impact wildlife will have on your cherry crop- the further away from cover of the woods, the less inclined they are to steal the fruits of your labour! Once a cherry tree is established, they need little assistance to grow and bear fruit.

Planting

Tree spacing is influenced by the rootstock and your pruning plans. Our cherry trees are grafted onto mahaleb rootstock meaning they will grow 16-20' at maturity. It's best to leave space between trees for air flow, so we recommend planting them 20' apart if you have the space to do so. If you have a smaller area, remember you can keep them pruned to any size you want, so you can maintain them much smaller. Dig a hole twice the size of the pot and loosen up as much soil as you can around the hole. As you fill in around the root ball be sure to pat the soil down to remove any air pockets. DON'T add fertilizer to the hole as you can burn the roots. Ensure the soil level at the top of the pot is level with the ground - don't bury the trunk deeper than it was in the pot! Water well. Mulching the ground around the tree helps maintain moisture in the soil and cuts down on competition from weeds. DON'T put the mulch right up against the trunk of the tree - keep it out a few inches. A spiral tree guard is recommended to protect the trunk from damage as well as rodents chewing the nutritious bark in the winter months.

Pruning

When you receive your cherry tree it will have no/very few branches at this stage. 2nd year trees should have any branches removed from the bottom 18" and remaining branches spaced well apart in different directions. Early blossoms on the tree should be pinched off to help the tree focus its energy into structural growth rather than fruit production. Your goal in pruning the young tree is to form a balanced framework that will guide the tree's growth into the future. It's best to prune harder in the early years to shape the tree, as opposed to serious corrective pruning later on!

Harvesting

Sour cherries generally start producing fruit at 3-5 years-sweet cherries are slightly longer between 4-7 years. One definite sign your cherries are beginning to ripen are the birds will begin harvesting! The sugar content increases significantly the last few days of ripening so wait till they are firm and fully red-neither type of cherry will continue ripening after it has been picked. Tart cherries come off the stem easily when they are ripe-sweet cherries should be taste tested to see if they are ready.