

Prunus cerasus

[Synonyms : *Cerasus acida*, *Cerasus austera*, *Cerasus cerasus*, *Cerasus collina*, *Cerasus vulgaris*, *Prunus acida*, *Prunus cerasus* var. *typica*]

DWARF CHERRY is a deciduous shrub or tree. Of uncertain origin but possibly native to western Asia and south-eastern Europe it has clusters of small white flowers.

It is also known as *Almindelig kirsebaer* (Danish), *Alubalu* (Hindi), *Badgiole* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Ceiriosen* (Welsh), *Cereja comum* (Portuguese), *Cereza común* (Spanish), *Cerezo común* (Spanish), *Cerise commune* (French), *Chlisier* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Ciliegia comune* (Italian), *Ciliegio* (Italian), Common cherry, Egriot, *Gemeine Kirsche* (German), *Gewone kers* (Dutch), *Gilas* (Punjabi), *Ginja-de-folha* (Portuguese), *Ginjeira-galega* (Portuguese), *Guindo* (Spanish), *Hapankirsikka* (Finnish), *Karaz* (Arabic), *Kerseboom* (Dutch), *Kirâz* (Turkish), *Kirsikka* (Finnish), *Klarbär* (Swedish), Pie cherry, *Qarâssyâ* (Arabic), *Sauer-Kirsche* (German), Sour cherry, *Suminomi zakura* (Japanese), *Surkörs* (Swedish), *Surkörsbär* (Swedish), *Třešeň višěň* (Czech), *Višěň* (Czech), *Višěň obecná* (Czech), *Weichsel* (German), and Wild dwarf cherry.

Cerasus is Latin (cherry) and for some authorities honours the city of Kerasoun in Asia Minor (today more familiar as Giresun in Turkey) – or even the reverse that Kerasoun was named after the cherry.

Dwarf cherry is believed to be a parent of both the Maraschino (*Prunus cerasus marisco*) and Morello cherries (*Prunus cerasus austera*) as well as other varieties.

It is claimed to have been Lucius Licinius Lucullus (c.110-57 BC) who first introduced this species to Europe in 67 BC. As Roman consul he defeated Mithridates (c.132-63 BC) in the 3rd Mithridatic War and established many reforms in Asia Minor. His tribute included not only gold, silver and other precious gifts but also a cherry tree that he is said to have placed in a prominent position amongst the payments to indicate its greater value than the rest of the spoil. It is from this Roman soldier, who retired in great luxury and was famous for his banquets that a lesser known term ‘Lucullan’ was derived as a description of good food and entertainment.

Authorities believe that it was most likely the Romans who later introduced this species of cherry to Britain. At some point dwarf cherry reached North America. It is certainly cultivated on the Eastern Seaboard and locally the fruit are used to make pies and preserves.

Today on a commercial scale the dried fruit are used to make kirsch, cherry brandy, cherry juice, and a cherry syrup that is used as flavouring in proprietary medicines by the pharmaceutical industry.

Records show it came to be familiar to some North American Indian tribes. The Cherokee ate the small fresh, yellow to dark crimson berries – and used the lightweight, hard but brittle, light brown wood for construction and for making furniture. They also included dwarf cherry in their medicinal repertoire. It was used for treating measles, fever, laryngitis, coughs, colds and bowel disorders and it was also prescribed during childbirth and as a blood tonic.