

Prunus pensylvanica

[Synonyms : *Cerasus borealis*, *Cerasus pensylvanica*, *Prunus pennsilvanica*, *Prunus pennsylvanica*, *Prunus pensylvanica* var. *pensylvanica*, *Prunus persicifolia*]

WILD RED CHERRY is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to northern and eastern North America it has small white flowers with many stamens and leaves that turn yellow and red in Autumn.

It is also known as Bird cherry, *Cerises d'été* (French-Canadian), Fire cherry, *Petits merisier* (French-Canadian), Pigeon cherry, Pin cherry, and Red cherry.

Warning – the reddish-brown bark with its conspicuous orange markings can be poisonous, and the fruit stones are poisonous. The foliage can be poisonous for animals.

It is protected in the wild in the state of Indiana in the United States where it is now rare..

Pensylvanica means 'of or from Pennsylvania (United States)'.

Like those of other close relatives the tiny shiny red fruit were a source of food for several North American tribes including some of the Chippewa, the Iroquois, Potawatomi and some of the Algonkin. The latter and some of the Cree tribe both used wild red cherries to make a preserve, and the Cherokee made them into jam and puddings. Some of the Chippewa also made soup from them, the Iroquois used them to make a sauce, and both tribes stored them for later food.

Records show that the North American Cherokee Indians used the wood for construction, carving and making furniture.

Wild red cherry was a source of medicine for quite a few North American Indian tribes including the Gitksan – and seems to have been especially popular as a cough remedy (prescribed by the Iroquois, some of the Algonkin, the Potawatomi, Wet'suwet'en, some of the Chippewa and the Cherokee). The latter also used it to ease colds, measles, fever, oral problems and sore throats. They and some of the Algonkin prescribed it for blood ailments, and the Micmac, Cherokee and Malecite Indians applied it as a remedy for various skin disorders. It was used by some of the Algonkin during childbirth and turned to by them also for treating bronchitis. Some of the Chippewa valued it for easing stomach upsets, some of the Cree used it for treating eye problems, and the Iroquois also healed burns with it.

Locally the fruit are eaten but cooked first as they are so bitter. They are made into various puddings and are said to be prized for preserves.

Birds and animals (such as bears, foxes, raccoons, chipmunks and mice) are most partial to the fruit and the birds have even been known to strip trees bare.

Occasionally the wood has been gathered locally for fuel.

The plant itself has sometimes been cultivated on newly cleared land not only to shade seedlings of other species but also to help control soil erosion.

Medicinally, local herbalists have recommended a bark tea (made from young, thin bark) for treating coughs or easing nausea.