

Prunus salicifolia

[Synonyms : *Padus salicifolia*, *Prunus capollin*, *Prunus capuli*, *Prunus serotina* var. *salicifolia*]

CAPULIN CHERRY is a semi-deciduous tree. Native to Mexico and Guatemala it has small fragrant white flowers with conspicuous tufts of yellow stamens.

It is also known as Black cherry, *Capoli* (Colombian and Mexican), *Capolin* (Colombian and Mexican), *Capuli* (Bolivian, Ecuadorean and Mexican), *Capulin* (Guatemalan and Mexican), *Cereza* (Guatemalan), *Cereza común* (Guatemalan), *Cerezo* (Mexican), *Cerezo criollo* (Colombian), Colombian wild cherry, *Detsé* (Mexican), *Detzé* (Mexican), *Jonote* (Mexican), Mexican bird cherry, Mexican cherry, *Palman* (Mexican), *Puan* (Mexican), *Taunday* (Mexican), Tropic cherry, Wild cherry, and *Xengua* (Mexican).

Warning – bark, leaves or seeds brought into contact with water will release hydrogen cyanide. *Salicifolia* is derived from the genus name *Salix* and Latin *-folia* (leaved) meaning ‘with leaves like those of that (willow) genus’.

For many local Middle American and South American Indian tribes the glossy maroon to dark-purple (rarely white or yellowish) fruit formed a regular part of their diet – and it is said that they also became a significant part of the food available to the early Spanish conquistadores when they overran the region.

The small raw aromatic cherry-like fruit have long been eaten locally – or stewed, or made into jams, preserves or wine. Today the tree is cultivated for its fruit, especially in the Andean region where they are a familiar sight in local markets (as they are in Ecuador, Guatemala and El Salvador). It should also be mentioned that the flowers’ great attractiveness for bees has also meant that capulin cherry is a valuable honey tree.

Some authorities indicate that the seeds have been used in making paint and soap.

The very hard, strong and durable, reddish-brown wood has been used for general carpentry, turning and building interiors, as well as for making furniture. Old tree roots are said to be much prized and have been carved into tobacco pipes and figurines.

In 1924 the tree was introduced to the Philippines.

Medicinally, local herbalists have used leaf decoctions and infusions variously for internal treatments for dysentery, diarrhoea, fever, wind and headaches and in external poultices to ease inflammation. A fruit syrup has also been recommended for easing some lung disorders.