

New York City EcoFlora

Guide to Cherries and Plums (*Prunus*) in New York City



Prunus are a genus of trees or shrubs in the Rose family (Rosaceae) related to Apples, Spirea and Hawthorn. There are about 200 species worldwide, mainly in the north temperate zone, including many commercially important foods such as Peaches, Plums, Apricots and Nectarines. Twenty-seven species are indigenous to North America, evenly distributed across the continent so that each region has several species.

Our Cherries and Plums are small trees or shrubs (except Black Cherry), sometimes forming dense thickets from interconnected rootstock; sap bitter and aromatic; leaves alternate, simple with distinctly toothed margins and conspicuous glands on the petioles; stipules present; flowers in short clusters, umbels or elongate racemes; sepals, petals and stamens formed on the cup-shaped flower stalk (hypanthium) surrounding, but not fused to the ovary; petals five, white or fading to pink (pink in one N.Am. and some exotic species and with 5–50+ petals in horticultural forms); fruit fleshy with a single stony seed (drupe), various colors from yellow, red, blue and black.

Apples and Pears are closely related to Cherries and Plums but they have a multi-chambered ovary (of several carpels) that is surrounded by and fused to the floral stalk tissue (hypanthium) that becomes enlarged and juicy. The Apple we eat thus technically a stem and most people throw away the actual fruit. Look for glands on the leaf stalk (petiole). Our Plums and Cherries will always have them and the

Apples will not.

The Sweet Cherry (*Prunus avium*) is a Eurasian species that has naturalized in our woodlands. It is easily recognized by the prominent horizontal raised bands (lenticels) on the trunk. A few Japanese Cherries are beginning to naturalize in our region. They are small understory trees that bloom in early spring with or before the leaves and pink flowers. The indigenous Black Cherry has scaly bark like a Birch. Botanists use the technical term, “burnt potato chips” to describe it.

Checklist of Cherries and Plums in New York City

Prunus americana Marshall – American Plum

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).

Prunus avium (L.) L. – Sweet Cherry

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).

Prunus maritima Marshall – Beach Plum

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).

Prunus pennsylvanica L. f. – Pin Cherry, Fire Cherry

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).

Prunus pumila L. var. ***depressa*** (Pursh) Bean – Dwarf Cherry

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).

Prunus serotina Ehrh. var. ***serotina*** – Wild Black Cherry

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).

Prunus susquehanae Willd. – Appalachian Cherry

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).

Prunus virginiana L. – Chokecherry

[Specimens](#); [Observations](#); [Description](#); [Interactions](#).