

Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*)

Family: Rose (Rosaceae)

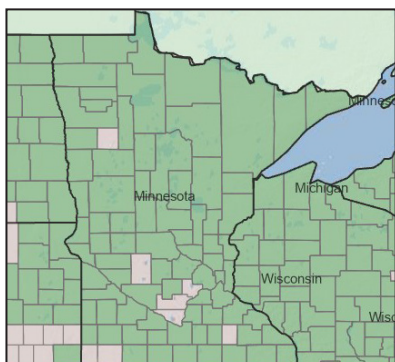
DESCRIPTION: A common tree in North America, the chokecherry produces fragrant white flowers from April to July, often before the leaves fully develop. Its fruit, a drupe ranging in color from dark red to purple or nearly black, ripens between July and September.

USES: Historically, Native Americans used all parts of the tree, brewing tea from its leaves and twigs to treat colds, and crafting its wood into arrows, bows and pipestems. Fruit is used to make jelly. The plant provides year-round habitat and food for wildlife including deer and birds. When stressed by conditions such as freezing or drought, the leaves, stems and seeds produce hydrocyanic acid, which can be poisonous to animals if ingested. It hosts various moth and butterfly larvae.

REFERENCES:

[University of Minnesota](#)
[USDA](#)

North American Wildland Plants: A Field Guide; J. Stubbendieck, S. L. Hatch, N. M. Bryan, and C. D. Dunn; University of Nebraska Press



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Planting Recommendations

Chokecherries grow well in moist soils and adapt to a wide range of soil types. Soils rich in organic matter support more vigorous growth and increased fruit production. For best results, plant in spring or fall to establish roots before intense summer heat. Dig a hole the same depth as the container and twice as wide. If planting multiple chokecherries, space them at least 5 feet apart in rows oriented north to south to optimize light exposure and reduce wind impact. Their rhizomatous roots spread by shoots, so plant where spreading

is acceptable. Water thoroughly after planting, and continue to water regularly during the first season to keep soil consistently moist. Chokecherries can be maintained as trees or shrubs. For shrub form, prune annually in late winter or early spring, removing about one-third of the oldest growth. For tree form, thin the center to improve light access and air circulation. Chokecherries are susceptible to pests and diseases such as tent caterpillars, aphids and black knot fungus. Monitor plant health and apply control measures as needed.

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR

STATUS: GP, MW,
NCNE: FACU

ID: A small shrub or tree, up to 30 feet tall, produces alternate dark green leaves on top and lighter green leaves underneath. The gray-brown bark is smooth with occasional scaliness. The clusters of five-petaled white flowers that bloom in late spring are followed by summer-ripening fruit. Mature plants form irregular thickets, spreading 10 to 20 feet wide.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) grows up to 50 feet tall with light green leaves and reddish hairs underneath. Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) reaches 25 feet, has a spreading crown, shiny gray-brown bark and subopposite to opposite leaves. It blooms in May and June, producing black fruit.

Developed by Sarah Hewitt, a senior conservation manager for Audubon Upper Mississippi River, based in Stearns County



Photo Credit: Marcie O'Connor, [Prairie Haven blog](#)