

Canadian Dwarf Sour Cherries Update – 2011 - 2012

The cherries have been delicious with no pests seen to date. They do seem to have some vegetative vs. flower bud issues though. You also have to watch the fruit carefully to determine proper ripeness.



Crimson Passion May 26, 2011



Carmine Jewel June 1, 2011

Flowering: We are seeing a phenomenon that is not unknown in the dwarf sour cherries. The barren branches (above) are caused by the previous years' fruit production when almost all the buds were reproductive and not many were vegetative. These areas will not become leafed or fruitful and should be pruned out. 'Crimson Passion' has shown a strong tendency toward this pattern and this creates a dilemma when pruning. It's obvious that these branches will have to be renewed – and yet the form I have created is so nice! 'Carmine Jewel', on the right, is not really showing barren branches as much as it is showing the protection that snow gives in winter. The lower half of both varieties bloomed first and then the unprotected upper halves bloomed afterward.

A second possibility suggested by Larry Chaput and Dr. Dale Herman, is the possibility of damage to the buds due to reflection of sunlight back onto the branches from the snow. However, the appearance of barren areas in these plants is noted in *Dwarf Sour Cherries: A guide for commercial production*. 2004. Dr. Bob Bors and Linda Matthews. University Extension Press, University of Saskatchewan.

Pruning: Dr. Bors and his technician Rick Sawatzky recommended an open vase shape when we obtained these plants in 2007, with the caveat that care instructions were still emerging. There has not been much published since this time. In talking to a few growers in Canada though, it appears that they maybe letting the plants grow as they will – with no pruning for several years. Pictures seem to prove this. The plants are pruned for some openness after they are four years old, or so.

Ripening: When the cherries first turn red, they are not actually ripe. More sugars and flavors develop during the next several weeks. U-Sask says that the fruits can hang on the plants for a very long time while they are dead ripe, but I would not say that that is true here in North Dakota. In 2012, it was very hot just as the fruit ripened and considering the very early spring, all fruit harvests seemed compressed. It is recommended to let the fruit hang until it turns a dark shade of black-red; then wait about a week or more. However, in 2012, the cherries began to get soft just a few days after the color darkened. I would completely recommend waiting for this black-red shade to appear, but I would say that you can pick any time after that. Just watch your fruit and the weather.

Notes: In 2011, the fruit crop was a bit smaller than I had expected from the number of flowers. Our harvest, however, was decimated by a hail storm on July 24. Prior to harvest, we used gloves and picked up fallen or injured fruit. At harvest, we discarded many moldy cherries.



Damage seen at harvest.



Immediate hail damage

Name	No. of plants	Harvest (lb)		°Brix	
		2011	2012	2011	2012
Carmine Jewel	12	34.1	137.6	12.1	13.4
Crimson Passion	11	2.7	94.7	14.6	15.6