



Prunus caroliniana Cherry-Laurel¹

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INTRODUCTION

A dependable, easily-grown, North American native, Cherry-Laurel is densely foliated with glossy, dark green, evergreen leaves and can reach 40 feet in height with a 25-foot-spread though is often seen smaller when grown in the open (Fig. 1). Cherry-Laurel will create a very dense screen or hedge with regular pruning but is also attractive when allowed to grow naturally into its upright oval, dense form. Properly trained to a central leader, the plant could make a good small to medium-sized street tree. The tree usually maintains a good central leader and small-diameter, strong lateral branches following one or two proper prunings before the tree is 8 to 10-years-old. It was widely planted in Texas until the severe drought of the early 1950's weakened them. Many of these weakened trees eventually died from borers.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Prunus caroliniana*

Pronunciation: PROO-nus kair-oh-lin-ee-AY-nuh

Common name(s): Cherry-Laurel, Carolina Laurelcherry

Family: *Rosaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 10A (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: hedge; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; trainable as a standard; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been

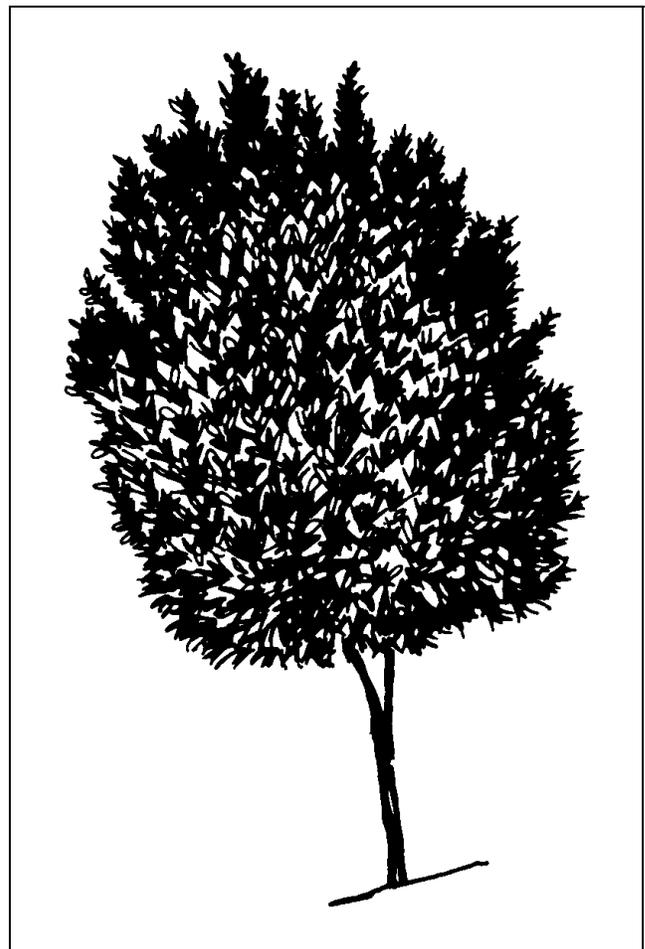


Figure 1. Middle-aged Cherry-Laurel.

successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 40 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: oval; round
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: medium
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire; serrulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); lanceolate; oblong
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen; fragrant
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: black
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

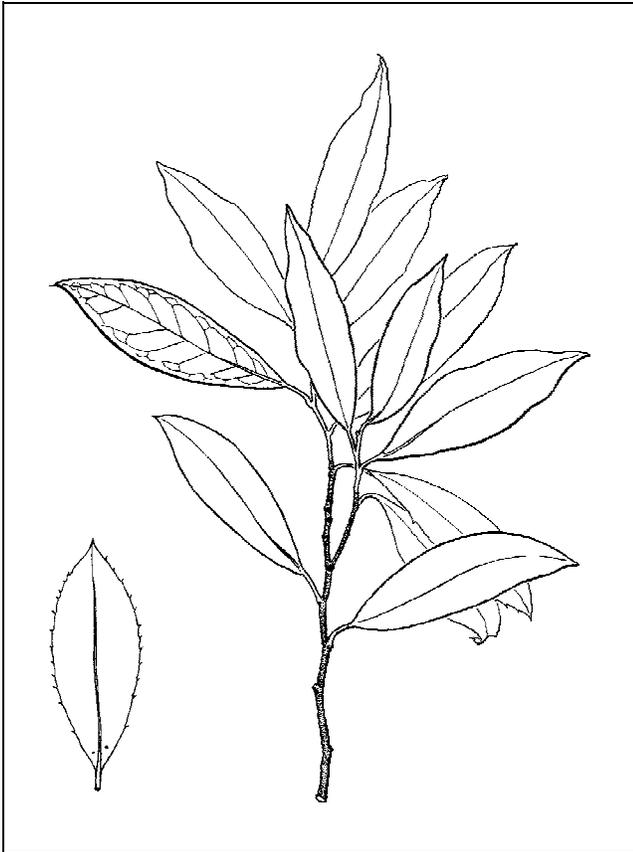


Figure 3. Foliage of Cherry-Laurel.

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: seeds itself into the landscape

Ozone sensitivity: sensitive or moderately tolerant

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

In springtime, tiny, creamy-white showy flowers appear in dense, fragrant clusters and are followed by small, shiny, black cherries which are quite attractive to wildlife. The flowers attract lots of bees. The great quantity of fruit may create a short-term litter problem if the trees are located near a patio or walkway but the fruit is small and washes away quickly. The quick growth and ease of maintenance makes Cherry-Laurel ideal for naturalizing and for low maintenance gardens except that hundreds of seedlings can be found beneath the crown each year from germinating seeds. Of course, this would not be a problem in a street tree planting or in an area such as a lawn or highway median which is mowed regularly. Though the crushed leaves and green twigs give off a delicious maraschino cherry fragrance, they are quite bitter and possibly poisonous. Root systems are often quite shallow but usually they are not aggressive and do not cause problems.

Preferring ample moisture while young, Cherry-Laurel is otherwise well-suited to sun or shade locations on any average, well-drained soil. Once established, it is salt- and drought-tolerant requiring little or no irrigation. Over-irrigating can cause chlorosis and death. Do not plant in wet, soggy areas. The tree adapts well to soils with high pH. Clay soil is fine as long as water doesn't stand after it rains.

The cultivars 'Compacta' and 'Bright 'N Tight' have a very dense, compact habit of growth, to about 20 feet tall.

Propagation is by seeds, cuttings, or by digging seedlings which appear in great numbers around mature plants.

Pests

Some of this tree's pests are mites, borers, and caterpillars. Borers are troublesome on stressed trees.

Diseases

Cherry-Laurel may be infected by leaf spot, fire-blight, and stem canker. It can be difficult to grow in containers due to root rot and over-irrigation.