

Harvest of  
the Month  
at Home

# Cherries



Lapin - Sweet

## Did You Know

- Cherries are in the rose (rosaceae) family that also includes apples and other “stone fruit” such as peaches, apricots, and plums. Stone fruit species produce fruit that has one seed, called a pit.
- There are two main types grown commercially, “sweet” and “tart”. Sweet cherries, as the name suggests, are sweeter than tart cherries and are also larger. They are typically eaten fresh. Tart cherries, also called “sour” or “pie” cherries, are smaller, more tart tasting, and are typically used in baked goods. Dwarf sour cherries are a new, bush-type cherry that produces tart cherries but is easier to pick and more cold-hardy.



Rainier - Sweet



Montmorency - Tart

- Most of the sweet cherries grown in Montana are grown on the east side of Flathead Lake in western Montana, where the climate is protected from extreme winter temperatures and spring frosts. “Flathead Cherries” are not a variety of cherry, but the name refers to all sweet cherries grown in that region. The Flathead cherry industry was established in 1895.



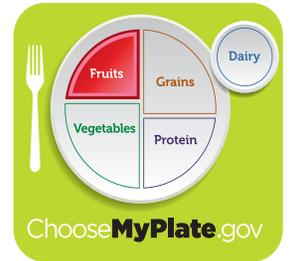
- On average, Montana growers produce two million pounds of sweet cherries each year. More than 640 acres of sweet cherries and 90 acres of tart cherries were growing in Montana in 2017.
- Chokecherries are a shrub-like member of the cherry family that are native to Montana and most of the United States and Canada. Native Americans have traditionally eaten the fruit and used other parts of the plant for medicinal uses. Crushed chokecherries are one of the ingredients in pemmican, a traditional food that also includes dried game meat, bone marrow, or lard. This high energy food can be stored to be eaten later, such as during



Chokecherries

the winter. Chokecherries are also used to make jelly, syrups, and sauces.

- Cherry seeds, leaves, and stems can be poisonous since they contain small amounts of cyanide. These parts of the plants are especially toxic to livestock.
- All cherry varieties are packed with flavor and nutrients. One cup of sweet cherries, tart cherries, or chokecherries provides a good source of vitamin C. Vitamin C helps build a strong immune system for fighting off disease and infection. It also helps the body absorb iron from plant-based sources. Tart cherries are also loaded with vitamin A, which is important for vision and helps with many other functions in the body.



## Gardening

Like apples, domesticated cherries will not grow “true to type” if grown by seed. If you plant your favorite sweet cherry pit, the cherries on the tree will not be the same variety as the cherry you ate, and likely will not taste very good. Nurseries “graft” new trees to grow fruit of a desired variety by attaching a branch of the desired variety to a rootstock to produce a new tree. Sweet cherry varieties are typically not hardy enough for most of Montana, therefore are mostly limited to the Flathead Lake region. Due to fruit flies and other pests, sweet cherry trees may need significant management. Contact your local Extension office regarding regulations and recommendations prior to planting sweet cherries.

Certain varieties of tart cherry trees can be grown in zones three and above, making them suitable for growing in most of Montana. Plant trees in a sunny area. Avoid planting in depressions or hollows where cold air can settle. Fruit trees need to be pruned in the spring. After planting, cherry trees can bear fruit within 2-3 years. Sweet and tart cherries are harvested in mid-July to mid-August, depending on the variety and weather.

Chokecherries can be grown by a variety of methods including by seed, rhizome cuttings, and grafting. Dormant plants should be planted in early spring or late fall at least six feet apart. Proper pruning is important to promote branching and fruit production. Chokecherry bushes and other bush

cherries should produce fruit 2-4 years after planting. Mature bushes produce about 30 pounds of fruit each year.

For more information about growing and caring for cherry bushes and trees, visit [www.msuxextension.org](http://www.msuxextension.org) for Mont-Guides and resources or contact your Extension office.

## Buying Tips

Cherries do not ripen after picking, so they are harvested when ripe. Choose ripe cherries that are firm, glossy, and vibrantly colored. Avoid soft, bruised, or wrinkled cherries. Wash cherries prior to eating or using in a recipe.

While cherries can be stored at room temperature, storing in the refrigerator in a perforated or open plastic bag will extend their shelf life. Cherries absorb surrounding odors, so store cherries away from strong-smelling foods. Cherries can be frozen or dried for enjoying later. Frozen cherries can be cooked or used in baked goods. Keep dried cherries in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to one year. Pit cherries prior to freezing, drying, or cooking.

## Cooking

**Pit.** Cut the cherry in half and scoop out pit with finger or spoon and discard the pit. A cherry pitter is a kitchen gadget that will make the process easier.

**Fresh.** Rinse, dry, and remove the pits to enjoy cherries as is, or slice in halves or quarters to serve in a fruit or green salad, salsa, yogurt, or granola. Mix into a smoothie for an added sweet and sour flavor and red color.

**Frozen.** Arrange a single layer of cleaned and pitted cherries on a tray and put into the freezer. Once frozen, store in an air tight container or freezer bag. Enjoy this juicy, cool treat on a warm day, or add to smoothies and baked goods.

**Baked.** Add pitted cherries to pies, muffins, or breads. Roast a single layer of pitted cherries sprinkled with sugar to make baked cherry topping or combine with poultry, game, or pork for a sweet and tart addition.

**Dried.** Place whole pitted or halved cherries on a tray and dehydrate at 125-135°F for approximately 12-24 hours.

**Season.** Enhance the flavor of cherries with cinnamon, black pepper, vanilla, sage, basil, mint, or thyme.

**Preserve.** For information on preserving sweet cherries, tart cherries, or chokecherries as a jelly or syrup, look for

Extension MontGuides on: Making Jams, Jellies, and Syrups including with wild Montana berries and fruit. Visit [www.msuxextension.org/nutrition](http://www.msuxextension.org/nutrition) and click on the food preservation link or contact your Extension Office.

## Recipe

### Cherry and Yogurt Parfait

Developed by: What's Cooking USDA Mixing Bowl, USDA

#### Servings

6

#### Ingredients

3/4 cup Granola, *whole grain rich*  
3 cups Fresh cherries, *pitted and whole, sliced, or chopped*  
3 cups Plain yogurt, *low-fat*  
1/2 tsp Vanilla extract  
1 Tbsp Honey

#### Preparation

1. Set out desired number of cups (about 9 oz each) on work space.
2. Place 1/2 cup cherries in each cup.
3. Combine yogurt, vanilla, and honey in a large bowl. Stir well.
4. Portion 1/2 cup (about 4 oz) yogurt mixture on top of cherries.
5. Sprinkle granola on top of yogurt, portioned evenly between desired number of cups/servings.
6. Serve immediately.

## Book Nook

*How to Make a Cherry Pie and See the U.S.A.*, by Marjorie Priceman

*Cherries and Cherry Pits*, by Vera B Williams

*5 Cherries*, by Vittoria Facchini

*Hidden Cherries*, by Anne Margaret Lewis



## Dig Deeper

For sources and photo credits along with more recipes, lessons, quick activities, resources, and guides, visit: [mtharvestofthemonth.org](http://mtharvestofthemonth.org).

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The Montana Harvest of the Month program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana schools and communities. This program is a collaboration between Montana Farm to School, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Team Nutrition Program, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, Montana State University Extension, Gallatin Valley Farm to School, Montana Department of Agriculture, Montana Organic Association, and FoodCorps Montana. More information and resources are available at: [mtharvestofthemonth.org](http://mtharvestofthemonth.org).

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