

Chokecherry

Prunus virginiana

Chokecherry (also known as bitterberry and Virginia bird cherry) is native to Aitkin County. Chokecherry leaves are 2"-3" long, and have slightly serrated edges. Clusters of ½" white flowers bloom May-June. As the name chokecherry implies, the fruit is similar to a cherry, but is much smaller, approximately ½"-1" wide. Birds, rabbits, rodents, and bears all eat fruit, and the tree provides several bird species with shelter. Many pollinators are attracted to white, spring-time blooms. Although chokecherries produce bitter fruit, cooked chokecherries are often used to make jam, pie, and sauces. A row of chokecherries creates a small windbreak.

Height: 20' to 30'

Under favorable conditions, chokecherry is relatively slow-growing. In drier, sandy soils, chokecherry will grow to a smaller height and wider.

Planting environment:

Soil composition: Prefers loam, will grow in sandy loam

Soil moisture: Moist to moderately well-drained

Sunlight: Very shade intolerant to shade intolerant (>6 hours of sunlight/day)

Plant chokecherry with 5'-10' spacing.

Maintenance:

Chokecherries can be pruned in late winter/early spring to maintain a specific shape. Removing lower branches will encourage taller growth, while more aggressive pruning (1/3 of old growth, pruned annually) will increase new growth in a shrub shape.

Top diseases/pests:

1. Black knot
2. Bears
3. Winter/ice damage

