

# The Rainy Season has arrived: Let's Plant Cherries

'Cherries' are a group of exotic fruits, which are broadly of two types. The first type is from the temperate or cold regions of the world, fruits of which are widely used in garnishing the food items such as cakes, pastries etc. The other type comprises of species from tropical parts of the world, examples of which include West Indian Cherry, Surinam cherry and few others. Among them, West Indian cherry or Acerolaisan important species worldwide. Being native to tropical regions, the species is suitable for cultivation in the islands.

Red-attractive-tangy, that's how we can describe the fruits of West Indian Cherry! Fruits are not only appealing to the eyes, but are also amongst the richest sources of vitamin C in the plant kingdom. Did you know that vitamin C content in these cherries is 20-25 times higher than that in oranges, about 5 times higher than that in guava and 2-3 times higher than that in aonla (amla)! Fruits are rich in carotenoids, phenolics, anthocyanins and flavonoids. All these compounds make the fruits rich in antioxidants and hence, they are suitable for consumers of all age groups. Plants are quite hardy and grow as a bush, which makes them suitable for planting in bigger sized pots. It could be an elegant member of roof top gardens and even balconies, apart from backyard orchards. It responds well to training and pruning (shaping of plant) and hence, the species is a promising candidate for live fencing as well as hedges for pathways. So, you can relish these tiny power-packs of nutrients just on the go!

Plants can be propagated by taking stem cuttings from

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mature plants during rainy season. Each cutting should be about 10-15 cm in length and of pencil size thickness. About one year old rooted cuttings can be transplanted to the planting site. In other words, if you take cuttings during this monsoon season, saplings will be ready for planting by next monsoon. Or else, plants could simply be purchased from ICAR- Central Island Agricultural Research Institute (CIARI), located at BhatuBasti. If saplings are to be planted in pots/ containers, care has to be taken for provision of drainage. For this purpose, drainage holes are made at the bottom of the container and small stones/ pebbles and coconut husk could be added before filling the potting mixture i.e. soil: well decomposed farmyard manure (3:1 parts). As the plants grow, they can be trained



as per one's wish to form the canopy of desired shape. If it has to be planted on the boundary, plants should be planted at closer spacing to form denser hedges.

The plant requires minimum maintenance and is almost free from diseases and insect pests. It responds well to the organic manure and locally available vermicompost or farmyard manure could be used for growing this plant. It means that no chemical inputs are required for its cultivation and organically produced fruits will be available in home itself.

Depending upon plant growth, these bushes come to bearing within 2-3 years of planting. Two to three major fruiting seasons are noticed under island conditions. Urban dwellers with limited space availability can grow a few plants in big sized pots/ old buckets. If planted as hedges especially in the parks and schools, the attractive red fruits would provide vitamin C to the children. West Indian Cherry could be a good option for business establishments including hoteliers in the islands as well as for inclusion of these plants in their landscape or as a potted plant in the sunny balconies.

In a nutshell, West Indian Cherry could be a nutritious and attractive choice for your homes, parks, schools and commercial setups. So, step out and plant a cherry in your garden. If you have any queries regarding cherry cultivation, kindly contact the experts at ICAR-CIARI, BhatuBasti, Port Blair.

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