

Plant Health Care Recommendations for Flowering Cherries

Flowering cherries are members of the genus, *Prunus*, which also includes peaches, plums, apricots and almonds. Dr. Michael Dirr, University of Georgia professor, states the following regarding flowering cherries¹: “The delicate flowers pass quickly but in their finest hours are the equal of any ornamental tree. Unfortunately, *Prunus* as a group is beset with insect and disease problems and perhaps should not be looked upon as long term garden investments”.

The flowering of the cherries in Washington, D.C. is an annual event of international significance. Originally a gift of 3,000 trees from the Japanese government, the cherries around the Tidal Basin were planted in 1912. Of the 12 varieties originally planted, the two still found in Washington are also the most commonly found in landscape use today are:

- Yoshino Cherry (*Prunus x yedoensis*), a medium sized tree, 40-50’ tall, with slightly fragrant, pink or white flowers.
- Kwanzan Cherry (*Prunus serrulata* ‘kwanzan’), a small tree, 20-30’ tall with large, double pink flowers.

The cultural requirements of cherries vary with rootstocks and varieties, but all cherries require full sun and well drained soil. Cherry trees are easily damaged by planting too deeply or by allowing mulch to remain against the lower trunk. Cherries respond well to fertilization, which helps keep the trees growing vigorously and able to resist pest problems.

Flowering cherries have more pest problems than most trees. The most common problems in the landscape include the following:

1. Cankers and blight - Many fungi, including shoot blight and black knot which attack trees weakened by transplanting and environmental stress.
2. Root rots - Caused by *Phytophthora* and many other fungi. Mainly a problem in poorly drained, heavy soils.
3. Borers - Peach tree borer (*Synanthedon exitiosa*), shothole borer (*Scolytus* sp.), and many other insects invade the bark and stems of cherries.
4. Scales - San Jose scale (*Quadraspidiotus perniciosus*), white peach scale (*Pseudaulacaspis* sp.) and several other species feed on cherries.

5. Caterpillar defoliators - Cankerworms (*Alsophila* and *Paleacrita*), tent caterpillars (*Malacosoma*) and many others feed on cherry leaves.

Recommended Monitoring for Flowering Cherries

Timing	Treatment
Late Winter	Sample soil for nutrient and pH levels especially if nutrient deficiency symptoms are evident. If plants exhibit decline, sample roots or root crown for <i>Phytophthora</i> root rot and nematodes. Corrective prune crowns. Remove dead, dying, diseased (pay particular attention to canker branches) and conflicting limbs. Inspect root collar and excavate.
Early Spring	Apply oil to suppress scales, mites and aphids. Apply fungicide treatment to suppress leaf spot, shoot blight and black knot on trees with a history of these diseases.
Mid Spring	Apply fungicide treatment to suppress leaf spot, shoot blight and black knot on trees with a history of these diseases. Apply fertilizers and soil treatments to adjust pH as needed based on soil test results. Monitor and treat* for borers, scales, caterpillars, mites and aphids.
Late Spring	Apply fungicide treatment to suppress leaf spot, shoot blight and black knot on trees with a history of these diseases. Apply borer treatments to any tree with a history of borer damage, or with injuries to the bark or to recent transplants. Monitor and treat* for borers, scales, caterpillars, mites and aphids.
Early Summer	Monitor and treat* for borers, scales, caterpillars, mites and aphids. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to reduce moisture stress and prevent root disease. Inspect mulch levels and adjust as necessary. Prune out any cankered or blighted branches.
Mid Summer	Monitor and treat* for borers, scales, caterpillars, mites and aphids. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to reduce moisture stress and prevent root disease. Inspect mulch levels and adjust as necessary.
Late Summer	Monitor and treat* for borers, scales, caterpillars, mites and aphids. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to reduce moisture stress and prevent root disease. Inspect mulch levels and adjust as necessary.
Early Fall	Monitor and treat* for borers, scales, caterpillars, mites and aphids. Ensure adequate soil moisture levels prior to onset of winter to minimize injury. Remove any mulch from stems to reduce risk of disease and rodent injury. Apply soil insecticide treatment to reduce pest problems next year.

* Apply treatments only when inspection has established that they are warranted.