

BARBADOS CHERRY

West Indian Cherry, Acerola

Malpighia punicifolia

Malpighiaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

Barbados Cherry is a large bushy shrub or small tree native to the Lesser Antilles Islands and neighboring northern

Uses

The tree bears cherry-like, three lobed fruits, from ½ to 1 inch long with bright red skin and very juicy pulp. Its popularity is based on the fact that the fruits contain an extraordinarily high amount of ascorbic acid. The juice has been used to fight sore throat, coughs and colds. The bark contains tannin for use in dyeing leather and the wood is very heavy and hard to ignite.

Cultivation

This cherry is easily grown under a variety of conditions and will continue to bear for as long as fifteen years. As long as it is well drained, the soil can be clay, limestone or marl but added organic matter will increase performance. Mature trees can withstand temperatures as low as 28° F. Though it can tolerate long periods of drought, it may not yield fruit until the rainy season begins. Fruit set is significantly increased by the presence of honeybee colonies within one mile. Rooted cuttings are the best method for reproduction. Some trees will begin bearing in as few as two years but better yields are realized after three years.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Barbados Cherry trees bear fruit over a long period of time requiring picking several times each week by hand. Slightly under ripe fruit will handle better and retain more vitamin C if it is not left to thoroughly ripen. Seeds to be saved should come from plants that have not been cross-pollinated and from fruits that are very ripe. They should be cleaned, dried and dusted with a fungicide.

Pests and Diseases

The greatest threat to the health of a Barbados Cherry tree, especially in sandy, acid soil is the root-knot nematode. Mulching and regular irrigation can keep the tree healthy enough to resist and still bear a crop.

Cooking and Nutrition

Though there have been exaggerated claims made in the past, it has been determined that an under ripe cherry has up to 90 mg of ascorbic acid. Compared to an equal amount of the edible part of an orange, the Barbados Cherry has 20 times the ascorbic acid. The cherries are quite perishable and even under refrigeration, will only last three to four days. They may be made into juice or puree but within a week the ascorbic acid and color are greatly reduced

References

[Plants for a Future](#)

[Food Plants International](#)