

‘Cutie Pie’ Sour Cherry, New for 2021 *By Bob Bors*

Released on the 100th anniversary of Horticulture
at the University of Saskatchewan



History

‘Cutie Pie’ is a grandchild of Les Kerr’s secret breeding program. Sometime in the 1940s while working for the federal government in Manitoba, Les Kerr began interbreeding Mongolian sour cherries (*Prunus fruticosa*) and European Sour cherries (*Prunus cerasus*). When he became head of the Forestry Farm Shelterbelt Centre in Saskatoon (part of the federal government) he was supposed to be breeding only shelterbelt plants. But he never gave up on his goal to create hardy sour cherries for the Prairie. He continued making crosses among superior plants but all the plants were planted at various friends farms to avoid the scrutiny of his Ottawa superiors. In total he worked about 40 years on this project! During the last few weeks of his life when he was hospitalized, he sought the advice of George Krahn of Lakeshore nursery about what to do with his hidden treasures. George convinced him to donate the collection to the University of Saskatchewan breeding program which at the time was under the direction of Dr. Cecil Stushnoff with Rick Sawatzky as the head technician. Les informed them which farms to visit to see his best cherries. Stushnoff and Sawatzky visited the best farms gathering fruit for seeds and cuttings which were then grown at both the University of Saskatchewan and Lakeshore nursery. When those seedlings grew up, Rick Sawatzky scrutinized the Lakeshore collection and gathered seeds for the next generation to be grown at the University. ‘Cutie Pie’ resulted in the next generation. It was selected for being unusually dwarf, sweet, and having bright red cherries. Having personally tasted a few hundred Mongolian European hybrids at one of our former testing spots, I can attest that most are extremely sour and Cutie Pie is the best tasting of that type..

Description

While most of the University of Saskatchewan cherries are 3 to 4 grams, 'Sweet Thing' has large burgundy fruits in the range of 5 to 6 grams. They are sweeter and firmer than most sour cherries. The bush is expected to grow to about 2.5 meters, but needs additional testing in more areas. The original plant was a heavy producer when only 1.5 meters tall.

For more information, download "Growing and Using University of Saskatchewan Sour Cherries" from www.fruit.usask.ca .