

Availability of University of Saskatchewan Cherries for the USA



Virus-free certification

The USDA has strict guidelines for the importation of Sour Cherry plants from other countries. Plants must be certified as 'Virus-Free'. To be certified, a Sour Cherry plant needs to undergo 7 or so chemical and biological tests. The Biological tests require plants to show no viruses after two growing seasons. If the plants show any viruses they must undergo various treatments, often in tissue culture and then be retested. So minimally there is a 2 year waiting period. Costs are often about \$2000 per variety. This elaborate procedure is designed to help protect the fruit industry from importation of new diseases or known bad old diseases. After certification, it takes a while for nurseries to get start up material and propagate plants in sufficient quantities suitable for their customers. Some cherries were sent for certification 2 years ago, others just last year. Only a few of our cherries are currently certified.

Gardens Alive

Representatives from the American company "Gardens Alive" have visited our breeding program several times over the last 6 year and they have selected several cherries that they believe home gardeners would like to try in the US. Furthermore, they are paying for the virus certification of these selections as well as some of the Romance cherries. They have an exclusive contract for the USA for the varieties which they are putting through the virus-certification process. Worthwhile mentioning is that 'Gardens Alive' has provided us with a research grant to allow further research on cherries and other fruits. They are propagating Carmine Jewel and other cherries (some unnamed ones too!) as they become virus-free certified.

'Gardens Alive' is the parent company for several mail order companies, but will not be directly marketing our cherries. Instead their subsidiaries 'Gurneys Seed and Nursery' (www.gurneys.com) 513-354-1491 and 'Henry Fields Nursery' (www.henryfields.com) 513-354-1494 will be selling them. Both are currently offering the cultivar Carmine Jewel. I'm sure they would like to hear about your interest in the cherries and would be glad to send you a catalog. Please look for the newer cherry selections in these brands as they become available.

Both of those companies are geared for the home owner. If you are a farmer wanting commercial quantities, it is suggested you contact those companies to let them know you are interested. Gardens Alive is coordinating testing of our cherries in several locations including the University of Michigan that should give indications of commercial possibilities. It is my guess that the homeowner market will initially receive the first plants but once propagation is well underway they may either propagate plants for farmers directly or subcontract to nurseries who specialize in plant production for fruit growers.