

Why We Should Destroy Bitter Cherry Trees!

(*Prunus emarginata*, variety *mollis*)
“by Tom Lawrence, FLCG Fruit Fly Expert”

....This shrub/tree is a source of the cherry fruit fly and very common in the Flathead Valley between Woods Bay and lower Flue Bay. It is **NOT** the pin cherry (*Prunus pensylvaica*), and it is **NOT** the choke cherry (*prunus virginiana*).

It occurs here in shrub form, and in trees up to 9.9” diameter, 70’ tall, and 46 years of age. It can reproduce by seeds, but mostly it reproduces by sprouting from the roots. Look for them along roadsides, they bloom early in May. I have marked some along roads with orange and blue flagging tied together with one knot.



A good place to view the bitter cherry is about 200’ down Heather Lane, toward the lake, on both sides of the road. Here the grove is about one acre in size. (Heather Lane is across from Dick Wilson’s orchard and south of Dave O’Farrell’s house). The best time to identify them would be about May 10th.



Notice that the flowers are in clusters of 5 to 9 flowers on short stems. Although the choke cherry tree looks similar, the flowers are on one long stem with many flowers.

The fruit is yellowish orange, and somewhat soft during our cherry harvest season. This is when the fly larva is present in the bitter cherry. Later, in September, the fruit turns black and juicy and the fly larvae are gone.

The bitter cherry will be hard to kill since it reproduces by roots to form tickets. You will have to use an herbicide, or try to pull it out and get all the roots. Then watch for sprouts for a few years.

This plant was identified for us by Peter F. Stickney, Curator Emeritus, at the Forest Sciences Laboratory in Missoula.

If you need help identifying it after examining the trees with orange and blue flagging, then give me a call, and leave a message.

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