

# *Prunus mahaleb*

## Mahaleb cherry, St Lucie Cherry



*Prunus mahaleb* (mahaleb cherry) is a deciduous tree in the cherry family which is found in Southern and Central Europe, extending into Central Asia. The mahaleb cherry often grows together with *Fraxinus ornus*, *Crataegus monogyna* and *Euonymus europaeus*. This ornamental cherry has been used for centuries in Europe as an ornamental tree and was even mentioned in Medieval Arabian literature. *Prunus mahaleb* develops into a large characteristic shrub or small, mostly multi-stem tree approximately ten metres tall and six metres wide with a round open crown.

From March to June, *Prunus mahaleb* is covered with racemes of very fragrant, single white flowers. The twigs and wood are also aromatic. They are grey and smooth and peel off in small platelets as the tree matures. The blossom is pollinated by bees and hoverflies and the tree is, therefore, a top nectar and pollen provider. After it has finished flowering, small, edible, dark stone fruits appear and ripen between June and September but they have a bitter and acidic flavour. The glossy green leaves are ovate to round and have a lighter, hairy underside.

The mahaleb cherry is a heat-loving pioneer species that grows in open forests, on forest edges and riverbanks. *Prunus mahaleb* is, therefore, a good choice for landscape plantings, preferably on slightly poorer or drier soils that are lightly acidic to chalky. These growing site requirements also mean it can be used in containers or on roof gardens in more urban environments. The tree has many uses; the seed in the kernel is used as a tart sweet, nutty flavouring in all kinds of dishes from Turkey to the Middle East. This is known as 'mahlab' in Arabic. The wood is used for walking sticks and pipes. It is also used as a hardy rootstock for other cherries. The English name Ste Lucie Cherry and French name Bois de Sainte Lucie refer to the cloister of Saint Lucia in the Vosges where it was planted in large numbers.

### TYPES OF PLANTING

**Tree types:** multi-stemmed trees | **Other types of planting:** undergrowth | **Topiary on stem:** multi-stem umbrella

### USE

**Location:** park, central reservation, in containers, roof garden, large garden, cemetery, countryside, ecological zone | **Pavement:** none | **Planting concepts:** Eco planting, Landscape planting, Prairie planting

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Crown shape:** rounded | **Crown structure:** open | **Height:** 5 - 10 m | **Width:** 4 - 6 m | **Winter hardiness zone:** 5A - 8B

### ASPECTS

**Wind:** tolerant to wind | **Soil:** loess, sabulous clay, light clay, sand, loamy soil | **Nutrient level:** low in nutrients, moderately rich in nutrients | **Soil moisture level:** very dry, dry, moist | **Light requirements:** sun | **pH range:** neutral, alkaline | **Host plant/forage plant:** bees, butterflies, birds, small mammals, nectar value 5, pollen value 5 | **Extreme environments:** tolerant to dryness, tolerates heat

### PLANTKENMERKEN

**Flowers:** umbels, striking, standing, strongly scented | **Flower colour:** white | **Flowering period:** April - June | **Leaf colour:** matt green, underside blue-green | **Leaves:** deciduous, orbicular, ovate, wide, polished, serrate | **Autumn colour:** yellow | **Fruits:** edible, small, plum, drupe | **Fruit colour:** red, black | **Bark colour:** grey | **Bark:** peeling, smooth, later on rough | **Twig colour:** grey-brown | **Twigs:** hairy, vertical branches | **Root system:** deep, extensive, highly branched

