

Amur Choke Cherry



This article was written by: Warren Banks, Dakota County Master Gardener

The first article in this series focused on the Eastern Redbud. Its many interesting year round features show that there is no peer to this small tree. Another small ornamental tree that exhibits almost as many reasons to plant it in our urban, suburban and rural landscapes. The Amur Choke Cherry (*Prunus Maackii*), a member of the rose family (*Rosaceae*), is a native of Manchuria and Korea and was introduced to the U.S. in 1878. Amur refers to the Amur region of northern China where it was "discovered" by botanist Richard Maack. It has not been widely used in home landscapes, even today, but it can be found at some local nurseries. It is worth the effort to plant it in your landscape. They are pyramidal when young but with age they become more rounded. The most striking feature of this tree is its bark; glossy reddish-brown, even described as bronzy or copper. It tends to flake or peels like the paper birch. This makes an attractive contrast against the winter snow. In mid-May, there are clusters of slightly fragrant, white flowers. The black fruit provides an August feast for birds. In mid-September, the leaves turn bright yellow. The tree can be grown as a single specimen, but is more striking when grown as a clump. It enjoys any well drained soil and thrives at the edge of woods. The tree grows to about 35 to 45 feet high and wide and lives about 50 years.

Like with any tree, there are some weaknesses. When you purchase one that is potted, you need to be aware of their tendency for girdling roots. Follow all the recommended procedures in digging and planting. This fast growing tree has a tendency to get cankers and can suffer from fire blight. It can develop weak narrow crotches. This spectacular four season tree is well worth any failings that it might have in your landscape. As Michael A. Dirr notes in his Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, this tree "will make a believer out of any gardener".