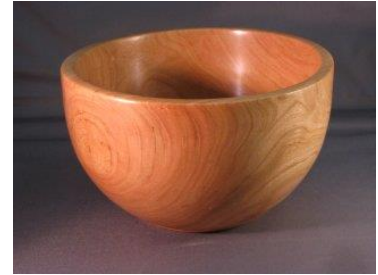


## Wood of The Month

### **Prunus serotina** – Black cherry



Black cherry, also known as, American black cherry, wild black cherry, black rum cherry, whiskey cherry and wild cherry has a long and proud history as a furniture wood, dating to the time of the early settlers. The colonists substituted American black cherry for the expensive, imported mahogany, calling the domestic wood with similar characteristics “American mahogany”.

“Cherry is probably the most popular hardwood in the world,” said Herb McClaugherty, president and CEO of the Dean Co. “In Europe, cherry is the second most-used cabinet wood. Here in the United States, cherry ranks as our most popular cabinet wood assuming red and white oak are treated as separate woods,” he said.

Black cherry’s range in North America extends from the eastern regions of Canada to the eastern part of the United States and into Mexico. The prime cherry wood traditionally comes from the Appalachian Mountain areas, a range extending from northern Vermont to North Carolina with the very best cherry coming first from Pennsylvania and then West Virginia and New York. Cherry trees thrive in Pennsylvania because they grow in stands rimmed by hemlock, which protects the cherry trees from strong winds. Cherry is a somewhat fragile tree because it can grow tall – sometimes 20 to 25 feet to the first limb – and it can be susceptible to wind damage.

Black cherry is a straight-grained, moderately hard wood with a specific gravity (ovendry) of 0.53 or about 36 pounds per cubic foot. The sapwood is narrow and varies in color from white to light reddish brown. The heartwood varies from light to dark reddish brown. Growth rings are fairly distinct, and wood rays are plainly visible to the naked eye. Dark red gum streaks are sometimes present. The wood is naturally dull but takes on a fine luster when properly finished. The wood’s color darkens with age, and it can be finished to bear a strong resemblance to genuine mahogany.

Black cherry is used principally in lumber form and for manufacturing fine furniture. In the printing and engraving industries it is used to mount engravings, electrotypes, and zinc etchings. It is also used for patterns, professional and scientific instruments, piano actions, handles wooden ware, toys, musical instruments, and of course, turning. Cherry is a wonderful wood to turn slicing with ease and finishing beautifully.

American black cherry is not the same tree that yields the fabulous fruit. However, its fruit has been used to flavor brandy and rum, hence one of the common names rum cherry. Extracts from the bark are used in the preparation of wild cherry syrup, a popular vehicle for cough medicines. The fruit can be used for making jelly or wine. Black cherry was widely used by Native Americans who used it to treat a variety of complaints. Bark tea was used in small amounts to treat fever, colds, sore throats, laryngitis, diarrhea, etc. The leaves, buds, twigs, seeds and bark contain glycoside prunasin, which is converted in the stomach to the highly toxic hydrocyanic acid (cyanide). Therefore, farmers are warned and have to be careful that downed or wilted foliage from the trees are not eaten by livestock which can poison and possibly kill them.

You can read more about Black cherry at; [Black cherry on the Wood-database](#) and [Black cherry on Wikipedia.org](#) .

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