

Bird cherry *Donnroisc*



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Prunus padus



DESCRIPTION

A deciduous tree up to 10m (30ft) in height. It bears leathery, elliptical leaves and has smooth grey-brown bark.

Flowering takes place in late April and early May. After fertilization the flowers droop, which helps insects to find the yet unfertilized blossoms. The fruits, which ripen in late August, are relished by birds. They are too sour for us to eat (and also slightly poisonous).

In upland areas bird cherry is found on acid soils. In the lowlands, it occurs in wet woodlands where the ground water is alkaline. It is hardy, casts only light shade and grows especially well along rivers.

PROPAGATION

Collect the berries as soon as they become black. Remove the flesh by mashing, discarding any seeds that float. Mix with moist sand or compost, place in pots and label. Keep outside in a shady spot. Protect from mice.

Check for signs of growth in spring. Sow in the nursery on seedbeds or trays, firm and cover with 5mm of grit. Keep moist. Transplant those grown in trays to individual pots, water and feed well. By autumn you will be rewarded with up to 50cm growth.

INTERESTING FACTS

- When cut down, bird cherry regenerates readily. New growth comes from the base and as suckers.
- The foliage of the bird cherry is poisonous to animals, especially goats.
- The wood is strong, fine-grained, and of a red colour. It is easily worked and takes a high polish.
- A beautiful sight in spring when covered with a mass of white blossom - attracting butterflies and many other insects.

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