



Cherries in the Desert Royal Lee & Minnie Royal

Cherries in the desert can be challenging. The average grower should probably direct their efforts elsewhere. However, for those who except the challenge the rewards are sweet, juicy and delicious. Let's address the two main issues. Summer Heat and Soil PH.

Extended summer temperatures in excess of 100 deg. F are not the best possible growing conditions for Cherries. In California's southern San Joaquin valley, lower deserts and Arizona's Phoenix and Tucson regions several cultural adjustments are a must to help break extended summer heat. First make sure to apply a 4" to 6" layer of bio- dynamic mulch to the soil surface. Bio-dynamics refers to mulch containing many different types of organic base and wood chips. Never use a mulch that is more than one third any type of organic product. Best possible product is a composted ground green waste. Fully aged and leached. This mulch will keep summer soil temperatures 15 to 25 degrees cooler than un-mulched soil. Second make sure to white wash trunk and branching structure every winter to protect against sunburn. Use a mix of water base white paint one-third with two-thirds water. Do not use straight paint. Third provide some afternoon shade during the hot summer months. Shade after 2:00 or 3:00pm is advisable to break the heat.

Next, let's address soil PH, most desert soils are high in alkalinity. Cherries prefer a neutral or slightly acidic PH. Do what ever you can to keep water PH at 7 or lower. Acidifying water is important. Make sure drainage is adequate so salts can leach and do not build up at the soil surface. If drainage is an issue plant Cherries on a mound or in a raised bed. Use a low nitrogen fertilizer that is high in humic acid. Feed at end of January and end of June. Do not feed from July until end of January.

Minnie Royal and Royal Lee are the only varieties currently recommended for desert growing conditions. For cross-pollination you must plant the pair together within 20' of each other. The closer the better.

To date the rootstock 3CR178 sold by Dave Wilson Nursery as New Root 1 seems to be the most compatible with desert heat. This rootstock has only been sold retail for three seasons so no accurate long-term information has been established.

Please keep us posted with your Cherry growing experiences. We want to know what works for you. As much data as possible is needed to establish accurate growing information for any cutting edge varieties or growing technique.

Have fun with it and enjoy your fresh Cherries.

Tom Spellman
Dave Wilson Nursery

For more information and to purchase Minnie Royal and Royal Lee Cherries visit
UrbanFarm.org.