



“Prune like a Pro!” 2021

Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*)

TITLE: Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) is an evergreen shrub that grows up to 20' tall and is dense and wide-spreading. Dwarf varieties grow up to 10' tall.

Description: The twigs of a cherry laurel are green and have a cherry odor when bruised, hence the common name. The shrub in the video is the dwarf cultivar 'Nana'. Other dwarf cultivars are 'Otto Luyken' and 'Schipkaensis', the latter often referred to as 'Schip' (Skip) laurel.

Objective(s): Learn to shape the cherry laurel shrub in its first few years so that you have a nearly maintenance-free shrub in the future.

WHAT: Do not confuse *Prunus laurocerasus* with *Prunus carolinana*. How to tell the difference? Check the plant tag. If you don't have the plant tag, you will need to examine the leaves. Glands on the lower leaf blade distinguish the cherry laurels, while glands next to the midrib distinguish the *Prunus carolinana*. Also, ***Prunus carolinana* stems, leaves and seeds are highly toxic to humans and animals.** With cherry laurel, *Prunus laurocerasus*, only the seeds are toxic to humans.

Also: do not confuse cherry laurel leaves with the culinary seasoning bay leaves, which are from a totally different plant, *Laurus nobilis*, which is generally not hardy in east TN winters.

WHY: Standard cherry laurels can grow up to 20' tall and can be pruned to a single stem and shaped like a tree. Compact varieties, such as the dwarf 'Nana' in the video simply need some basic shaping.

WHEN: Begin pruning plants when small to develop the desired form. Cherry laurel blooms in the spring, and should be pruned (if needed) immediately after flowering as a way to reduce seed production.

WHERE: Cherry laurel tolerates all sorts of light conditions from full sun to partial and even full shade.

HOW:

- Start by removing the 4 D's (dead, dying, diseased, dysfunctional) branches
- Prune to desired shape
- If you want a bushier shrub, prune to a leaf node to stimulate growth
- Deadheading flowers will reduce the seed production – and will reduce the number of seeds that will be spread by birds.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Prune all cherry laurels in the early years to establish the desired shape.
- Dwarf cherry laurels need very little pruning beyond the removal of the 4 D's
 - 4 D's can be removed at any time, but should be done at least annually
 - Pruning after flowering will reduce seed production **and** will direct the shrub's energy into growing branches rather than seeds.
- Standard varieties of cherry laurels may need more pruning, especially if you are trying to manage their size
- The seeds of cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) are toxic to humans and four-legged animals; do not let your children or pets ingest the seeds!



LEFT:
Cherry
Laurel
Flowers



RIGHT:
Cherry
Laurel
Seeds

Additional Resources / References:

"*Prunus laurocerasus*", North Carolina State Extension, Gardener Plant Toolbox,
<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/prunus-laurocerasus/>

"*Native Plants for Georgia Part I: Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines*", UGA Cooperative Extension,
<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B987&title=Native>

"*Gardening 101: Cherry Laurel*", GARDENISTA Jeanne Rostaing, Published: May 2, 2018,
<https://www.gardenista.com/posts/gardening-101-cherry-laurel-shrubs-plant-care-growing-guide/>

"Growing Cherry Laurel Plant", Gardening Know How,
<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/shrubs/cherry-laurel/growing-cherry-laurels.htm/>

Knox County Master Gardeners website: www.knoxcountymastergardener.org

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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