

THE BARBADOS CHERRY

by Iris Bannochie

Many of us in Barbados seem unaware of the importance of a small tree, regarded by the islanders as quite commonplace and found growing in many gardens or back-yard plots. This tree known as the Barbados Cherry (*Malpighia glabra*) is to be found in many parts of the tropics; in Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Florida it is cultivated on a large scale, being used commercially. We in Barbados, seeking to diversify our agriculture, could find this plant rewarding as we have ideal conditions for its growth.

In 1946 it was discovered by Asenjo & Gusman that the fruit of the Barbados Cherry contains one of the richest edible sources of Vitamin C (ascorbic acid), a substance essential for the health of the human body, the lack of which in the days of sailing ships caused scurvy. Later it was found that fresh fruit and vegetables could control this distressing illness which resulted in bleeding, loosening of the teeth, painful joints and wounds which failed to heal. Modern research has proved that ascorbic acid is necessary for many other functions including the manufacture of bone and there is reason to believe that it assists in the prevention of colds. Ascorbic acid is widely distributed, especially in fresh green leaves. Citrus fruit was for a long time considered the best natural source (the Royal Navy still has a daily issue of lime

juice as well as of rum) but in recent years other fruit including rose hips, black currants, guavas, strawberries, have been found rich

in Vitamin C. The Barbados Cherry is the richest of them all.

Oranges average 49 milligrams of Vitamin C per 100 grams (about 3½ oz. of fruit). Barbados Cherries average over 3,000 milligrams per 100 grams in fruit turning from green to red, and over 2,000 milligrams in the ripe sweet fruit.

The Barbados Cherry is mentioned in Ligon who states: "The fruit is useless and insipid: but the colour something resembling a Cherry, and the shape not much unlike; which caused the planters to call it by that name." As Ligon's book was written in 1657 only 30 years after the island was settled, it is evident that the tree was indigenous. Ligon obviously tasted a poor variety.

In the West Indies the plant is usually referred to as the "Cherry"; in Florida, "the Barbados Cherry"; the name used in Webster's Dictionary. In Puerto Rico it is called Acerola, and in other Latin-American countries Cereza (Spanish for Cherry) and it was so



Cherry tree in blossom.



Cherries on branch.



Close-up of cherries. Matchstick shows size of ripe fruit.

called by the early explorers. The name "Barbados Cherry" first appears to have been given to the shrub by Hans Sloane in 1725, when he describes it as growing in gardens in Jamaica.

The plant is known to botanists as *Malpighia glabra*, a Puerto Rican species as *Malpighia punicifolia*, however there is some doubt among botanists as to whether or not the two names are just describing variations of the same species.

The Barbados Cherry is a much branched, small evergreen tree which grows to a height of from 10 to 15 feet and is found in tropical and subtropical regions, being native to those areas of North and South America. The flowers are numerous, a pretty rosy pink, attracting bees in large numbers. The fruit is almost spherical, turning from light green when immature to yellow and then bright red. There are 3 or 4 separate, triangular seeds and about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the fruit is edible. The flavour is not too unusual, something like crab apple or wild raspberry but yet something quite distinct. There is a hint of the romantic tropics, and, it is exceedingly hardy and grows even in the poorest soils. It requires extra lime if grown in acid soils and so flourishes in Barbados. It responds dramatically to good treat-

ment and extra feeding. The trees are relatively free of insect pests and they can withstand drought. The only conditions they do not like are swampy, undrained areas.

The size of the crop is determined by the amount of rainfall and fertilizer. Under ideal conditions a Cherry Tree will fruit 8 or 10 times a year. Flowering occurs after heavy rains, with a crop of cherries exactly three weeks after the downpour.

Watering, if sufficient, will also produce the same result and consequently plants grown commercially, can be suitably irrigated. Provided the trees are given some fertilizer, crop after crop occurs in the rainy season, and in wet years some trees will bear almost continuously. Experiments were carried out by the Sub-Tropical Experimental Station of Homestead, Florida and in 1954 they reported an average annual yield, from five year old plants, of 21 lbs per tree or 5,880 lbs per acre, nearly three tons, under favourable conditions.

There is a wide variation among the Cherry Trees in the island, the fruit of some being large and sweet, others small and tasteless, the way Ligon described them; in between are the average trees. If we should want to use the Barbados Cherry on a commercial scale, then it would be necessary to use selected clones for planting, that is propagate from our best possible stock. Our present variation is because most of the trees now planted are casual seedlings. The Cherry can also be propagated by cuttings, grafts, and air layers, which will reproduce the same qualities as the parent tree.

The qualities we want to look for in these clones are:—

(a) the plant should produce heavy yields of large fruit with good flavour and a high juice and Vitamin C content.

(b) The fruit should have a relatively thick skin and firm flesh tending to reduce mechanical damage during harvesting.

(c) The growth of the tree should be open and spreading to facilitate picking. This can partly be achieved by correct pruning, but some varieties are definitely more bushy than others. On a large scale harvesting would have to be done by some arrangement of nets.

A survey of the cherry trees would have to be made and the best varieties selected; we may also

be able to import better stock from Florida and Puerto Rico.

Apart from growing the trees on a very large scale which could take time, we could make a start by advising everyone with a small plot of land to plant a Cherry Tree or two, to plant some of them on our rab land areas and have several trees around every school in the island, so that the children can eat them freely.

If we consider the cost of an orange and remember that the equivalent Cherry pulp contains almost 80 times more Vitamin C, then it is obvious that we are throwing away, and wasting a most valuable product. Besides Vitamin C, Cherries also contain other vitamins essential for health including: Ribo Flavine, Niacin, Thiamin, B6. Enterprising hoteliers and restaurateurs could serve a Cherry Punch to visitors. Cherry Daiquiri perhaps?

Uses and Recipes

Apart from the fruit, the Cherry Tree itself makes a handsome hedge and excellent windbreak. The tree is not deciduous and so can also be grown for shade, if properly pruned. During the last war when it was impossible to get fir trees in Barbados a well branched Cherry Tree was used at Christmas. Cut a few weeks before hand, so that the leaves fell off, the branches were then white washed and decorated in the usual way. The twigs of the Cherry Tree are sometimes lashed together to make a rough broom for sweeping leaves.

The skin of the Barbados Cherry is easily bruised and this has been the problem in shipping and handling the fruit. The Vitamin C content is highest just as the fruit is changing colour from green to red and so the fruit can be used from this green stage onwards to full maturity.

Cherry Juice

On a large scale the juice could be extracted by a paddle pulper, similar to that used in making tomato juice. For home consumption I use a moulie mill or crush the cherries with a fork and squeeze them through a coarse sieve. The juice can be served fresh, sweetened to taste, or it can be frozen and kept for long periods; this is easily done by putting the juice into an ice tray and then storing the cubes in plastic bags in

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The Cherry juice can be com-
bined with other fruit like lime,
orange, lemon, grapefruit, mango,
pineapple, soursop, pawpaw, gold-
en apple, banana, with or without
alcohol. It combines well with Gin,
Rum, Sherry, and can be substi-
tuted in recipes requiring fruit
juice.

**CHERRY PULP
FOR DESSERTS**

Wash and hull the Cherries, then
peel them, keeping as close to the
seeds as possible — (it is the peeled
portion one eats) — the seeds are
then rubbed through a sieve and
this pulp added to the peeled fruit.
We can use these prepared cherries
in many ways, storing in the deep
freeze, in plastic bags, until needed.

(1) Crush lightly, add sugar to
taste and refrigerate for several
hours.

(2) Add 2 or 3 tablespoonfuls of
water to each pint of fruit, sugar
to taste, a little Sherry or Cointreau
and put the mixture into a jelly
mould, freeze. Turn into a separate
dish immediately before serving.

(3) Use the fruit in one of the
commercial Gelatine mixtures;
Wild Cherry and Raspberry com-
bine well; follow the directions on
the packet for amount of liquid re-
quired and refrigeration directions.

(4) using Gelatine, egg whites
ect., you can substitute Cherries for
"Prunes" in a "Prune Whip."

(5) Use in a fruit salad with
other fruit.

(6) **Cherry Sherbert** 2½ cups
prepared cherries, add about one
cup of sugar (more if the fruit is
very acid). Add two tablespoonfuls
of orange juice.

Put this into ice tray and allow to
freeze until it is mushy and can
be stirred with a fork. Add
one stiffly beaten egg white to this
mixture, freeze, beating once more
at the mushy stage.

Vanilla ice-cream, or cream can
be served with all the above
recipes.

Cooking Cherries

Vitamin C is destroyed by heat
and most of the vitamin is lost
when fruit or vegetables are
cooked. So high is the concentra-
tion in our cherries that about one
quarter still remains or ten times
the equivalent in fresh orange
juice.

Cherry Jam

One of the secrets of making
good Cherry Jam is to pick the
fruit the night before, wash and
clean the cherries and leave them
covered with a cloth in a cool place.
Next morning you will find them
easily. Gently squeeze the seeds
eject the seeds. You can also
them, rub the seeds through a
sieve and add to the pulped fruit.
Measure your prepared cherries
and to each cup add one cup of
granulated sugar.

Using a thick bottomed saucepan,
simmer on low heat, stirring con-
stantly until all the sugar is dis-
solved, turn up the heat, and allow
to boil rapidly, but continue stir-
ring so as not to let the mixture
burn. Continue until a thick con-
sistency has been reached and the
fruit has become clear. Your spoon,
lifted out should drop three times
as it drains. You will have noticed
the two drops stage for some time,
but the jam is not finished until it
has reached a temperature of
230—236°F or the three drop stage.
Bottle, seal and store the jam in
the usual way.

Cherry Jelly

Put washed and hulled cherries
into a thick bottomed saucepan and
barely cover them with water. Al-
low to boil and simmer slowly,
until the fruit is soft. Gently press
the juice out and strain it through
muslin or a clean handkerchief.
The juice must be strained with-
out excessive squeezing if the jelly
is to be clear and sparkling.
Measure your juice. To each pint
add one pound of sugar (granu-
lated). Dissolve the sugar over low
heat by stirring, then boil rapidly,
without stirring, for about 12—15
minutes. When ready, two drops
should come together as on
one (Tem. 220°F). Put the jelly in-
to jars, not quite filling to the
top. Do not boil unnecessarily;
quick, short cooking preserves the
colour and flavour.

QUOTE

Love Hate Artist.

"The caricaturist — if he is a
serious artist — must love the
human race and have a passion for
its silly face."

Artist and caricaturist **EMILIO
COIA** in a BBC programme.