Yoshino Cherry Problems and Care
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In 1912, Japan presented 500 Yoshino Cherry trees to First Lady Helen Herron Taft. These were in appreciation of President Taft's help in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War. These cherry trees are the ones that help attract nearly 600,000 visitors to Washington, D.C. These trees usually live about 40 years. It is no surprise that only about 125 of the original trees remain. Retired National Arboretum botanist Roland Jefferson and others have been working for years to preserve these trees. They could be replaced with any Yoshino Cherries, but Jefferson and others wanted to use the same cherry trees, ones that were part of the original gift.

Original trees were identified and cuttings taken and rooted. Jefferson propagated over 100 trees between 1976 and 1979. First Lady Nancy Reagan gave one tree to Japanese ambassador Yoshio Ogawara in 1981. The President Reagan cherry and 1200 other cuttings Jefferson rooted were planted in Toneri Park in Japan.

The domestic planting has benefited from this program also. Jefferson collected more than a half million seed from Japan. This helps cherry breeders produce a better tree. Also, the National Arboretum has given 500 trees propagated from the original trees to preserve the beauty of the original trees given to the U.S. by Japan. This is an interesting marriage of botany and historic preservation. Hopefully in years to come, our children will enjoy the same beauty that we have for years.

Cherry trees are preserved in Washington, D.C. What about in Georgia? Yoshino Cherry trees do not do as well here. Georgia soils are hard, clayey and acid and our climate is hot and dry. What can we do to preserve middle Georgia ornamental cherry trees?

First plant them properly. Select well drained but moist, full sun sites. Dig large, wide beds to plant them in. Till an area four or five feet or more across. This will allow roots to get a strong start.

Yoshino cherries like a high soil pH - around 6.5 to 7.0. Georgia soils are often more acid than this. It is best to soil sample and lime accordingly. Without a soil sample, till 10 lb. of dolomitic lime in around the tree before you plant it. For established trees spread the lime around the tree and do it again next year. Remember that centipede lawns may not like this much lime and can be damaged.

Plant the tree as deeply as it originally grew. It may be best to plant into raised beds for best drainage, but if you do this it will be even more important to water the tree. Water immediately after planting to firm soil around the roots and then again in a day or so. Apply a two to three inch mulch around the tree. Water regularly the first year to thoroughly moisten the soil to a depth of 12 inches. Do this again when the soil gets dry two inches deep. Watering properly the first year is very important.

Cherries get a few pests. Bot canker kills back small and large branches from the tip. Look for browning under the bark and cankers on stems. Cut out all dead so that you only have living, healthy wood on that branch. Water and lime the plant if needed to promote good plant health. There is no spray to control Bot canker.

Ambrosia beetles bore small holes into stems and branches. They push out fine sawdust that can form toothpick like projections along the stem. Ambrosia beetles appear to be worse on young or weak trees and as cherries leaf out. Once they are in the plant, it is too late to stop them. Spray stems on surrounding trees to the point of run off with Permethrin to slow beetle spread. If the tree with these beetles dies, burn the tree to destroy the beetles still in the tree. Avoid burning trees that have been sprayed recently with insecticide.

Cherry trees will ooze sap for several reasons. This can be in response to disease, insects or the tree can ooze for no real reason. In any case there is little we can do to control this problem.

In conclusion, the best thing you can do for your Yoshino cherry is to give it proper planting and care. This should minimize problems and may extend the useful life of the tree.