



## Sand Cherry Care Sheet



Brought to you by  
S & S Bonsai of Colorado Springs, Colorado  
(Most of the included information is obtained from several  
online sources.)



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*"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if  
you were to live forever."*  
*—Mahatma Gandhi—*

# The Western Sand Cherry

(*Prunus besseyi*)

**General Information:** Many of the nearly 400 varieties of *Prunus* (this includes cherry, apricot, plum, almond, peach and evergreen laurels) are suitable for bonsai cultivation, though some are better suited than others with naturally smaller blossom sizes. This care sheet is more specific to the Western Sand Cherry Pawnee Buttes (*Prunus besseyi*).

Western Sand Cherry Pawnee Buttes (*Prunus besseyi*) is one of the hardiest of deciduous shrubs, growing to 3 to 8 feet with a rounded form. Preferring full sun, it adapts to heat and can be used in hot, dry areas. This shrub is also cold tolerant and hardy to zone 2. Well-drained soil is preferable, but it will adapt to most soils, including clay. Western Sand Cherry is rarely bothered by insects or diseases.

Single white blossoms that turn into 1/2 inch blue-black fruits. More tolerant of drier conditions. 'Pawnee Buttes' rich green leaves that turn red to purple in autumn. Low, shrubby habit, only growing between one and two feet tall in the landscape.

Jutting up from the plains of northeastern Colorado, the Pawnee Buttes are a majestic sight. This starkly beautiful land is also a place of extreme weather and growing conditions. Discovered growing there, Pawnee Buttes Sand Cherry is a unique groundcover variety of Sand Cherry. Enjoy it for its tough-as-nails constitution, groundcover growth habit, profusion of fragrant late spring flowers and fabulous glossy foliage. Fall turns the foliage a beautiful mahogany-red.

**Foliage** is silvery-green and shiny. Fall color is bronze to red.

**Flowers** are white, profuse, in clusters from May to June.

**Fruit** is a sour cherry, purple to black in color, that can be used in pies and jellies and are attractive to birds.

**Bark** is smooth and reddish-brown on young stems, rough and gray on older stems.

## CARE

**Temperature:** Cold tolerant and hardy to zone 2. Heat and wind tolerant.

**Lighting:** Full and afternoon sun.

**Watering:** Evenly moist. Can be watered more during flowering as flower buds may tend to drop if not enough water. They do not do well with constantly wet feet. This species will tolerate drought conditions in the wild but in a small bonsai pot, it is best not to let them reach this state. Less water in winter, but never let completely dehydrate.

**Fertilizing:** Balanced fertilizer every two weeks during spring and summer after flowers fade. Weekly feedings in summer months can increase flower bud production. Switch to a low nitrogen in late summer, then top off with a nitrogen free fertilizer in fall.

**Pruning / Training:** Generally, prune branches twice for good ramification. Once before flowering, cutting back to a point slightly above a flower bud, and a second time, once blooming is over. Cut back the second time to two or three nodes below where the flowers were, being sure to leave a couple leaf buds on each branch. Flower buds will mostly grow in the axils of the buds toward the base of most shoots. You can tell the difference between flower buds and leaf buds with a little practice- flower buds will be rounder and fuller, even by autumn, than leaf buds will be. They will be much larger than the leaf buds. Major pruning in late winter to early spring, after flowering but before summer, as the wounds will heal quickest then, and disease will have less of a chance before the weather turns warm. Allow to grow, uninhibi-

ted through summer, pruning back hard to four or five buds in autumn after leaf drop. If in doubt, don't prune in autumn. It can take some practice to recognize the difference between leaf and flower buds that early, and better to wait than to strip a branch of all of its leaf buds. Wiring can be done in spring and summer as needed. Keep in mind the size of the flowers when choosing how large your bonsai is to be.

**Insects / Pests:** Western Sand Cherry is rarely bothered by insects or diseases. Birds like to eat the flower buds. Also watch out for rabbits, who love to eat the young shoots.

**Propagation:** Mostly by soft-wood cuttings in the Spring or semi-ripe cuttings in the summer. Keep cuttings 4-6 inches with 3 sets of leaves. Sow seed outside in the autumn. Can be grafted and air layered.

**Repotting:** Repot every 1 to 2 years in the late winter or early Spring AFTER the flowering has finished. *Prunus* is an early bloomer so you do not want to repot too early in the Spring or you will lose your flowers. Delay pruning for three weeks after repotting. Well-drained soil is preferable, but it will adapt to most soils, including clay.

**Design and Styling:** Most styles but broom or Literati (or anything tall). Because *Prunus besseyi* is a ground cover, it will be hard to get a tall informal upright but it can be done over time. Lends quite well to windswept and semi-cascade and cascade.