

Cherry growing in Tasmania

Suitability factors for assisting in site selection



Sweet cherries are thought to have originated in western Asia around the Caspian and Black Seas. Sweet cherries are a perennial crop best suited to temperate climates. In Tasmania, they are grown in major apple production areas and more recently in the Coal River and Derwent River valleys.

Climate

Sweet cherries have a chilling requirement; that is they require cold temperatures during winter to ensure even bud break in spring. The chilling requirement is more than 800 hours of temperatures between 2°C and 12°C.

Temperature during the blossom period is important for pollination. Bee activity is reduced significantly by temperatures below 13°C, leading to lighter fruit set. Blossoming occurs from the 20th of September until late October. Strong winds can also reduce bee activity and therefore pollination. Planting windbreaks can help to reduce wind damage and improve pollination.

Frosts during the blossoming period can kill flowers and reduce crop loads. Care should be taken in assessing the temperature regime of any site prior to planting.

Ripening occurs from late November until early February. Low summer rainfall is an advantage as the splitting on ripening cherries is linked to summer rainfall and severe events can decimate crops.

Irrigation

Irrigation is a must for cherry orchards. Sweet cherries have a low tolerance of salinity and therefore require quality irrigation water.

Soil

Sweet cherries grow best on medium textured soils that drain well. Soils that have low fertility can be easier to manage because nutrients can be applied as required and vigorous growth can be controlled. Cherries grow best in soils with pHw of between 6.0 and 6.5. Cherries should not be planted into ground that has grown potatoes or tomatoes in the past 10 years due to the risk of *Verticillium* wilt fungus. A full soil survey assessing the factors listed above should be undertaken to help determine site suitability.

Drainage

Drainage is a critical factor when considering the suitability of new sites. Sites should only be selected if they are well drained or have the potential to be well drained, by putting in drains to remove excess water.

Slope and Aspect

A gentle slope is ideal for sweet cherries as drainage is often better as well as air flow. Sites that are sheltered from strong prevailing winds will have even and straight growth.

Pests

Pests, in particular birds, can cause major damage to cherries and it is now standard practice in most orchards to have bird netting to reduce damage.

Images supplied by Tasphoto Services, Department of Primary Industry, Parks, Water and Environment



Developing rules to guide enterprise suitability mapping

Many plants require particular climatic and land characteristics for best performance. Frost, winter chilling, summer heat, drainage, slope and salinity are some of these characteristics. For each enterprise mapped by the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) consulted industry experts and reference material to define land and climate “rules” that distinguish suitable from less suitable areas. These rules define the boundaries between the different classes of the enterprise suitability maps.

Suitability classes used are well suited, suitable, marginally suitable and unsuitable. Any limiting factors are also identified to guide the management practices that could help to overcome the limitations.

Landowners and potential investors are able to access comprehensive soil, climate, crop and enterprise information plus complementary farm business planning tools at:

<http://dipwe.tas.gov.au/agriculture/investing-in-irrigation>

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