In the Boston area winter's long grip eases with the onset of longer and warmer days in early April. Spring bursts forth with colorful flowers from such bulbous plants as winter aconites and snow drops, to be followed some weeks later by an abundance of color from flowering trees. One of the first trees to put forth blossoms is the rare and little-known cyclamen cherry (*Prunus cyclamina*). Early season visitors to the Arboretum cannot miss the spectacle of our large cyclamen cherry even though it is tucked away in a little-visited corner behind the hickory trees near the Centre Street Gate. Complemented by the soft yellow of the corylopsis flowers nearby, the cyclamen cherry stands out among its neighbors that, still leafless, retain the brown and gray hues of the winter landscape.

In response to moderating climatic conditions, *Prunus cyclamina* quickly takes on a rose-pink blush as the flower buds swell. Flowers of this cherry open a short time ahead of those of *P. sargentii* in early to mid-April, and they still remain when the petals of the Sargent cherry (*P. sargentii*) are only speckles of pink in the greening grass.

Blossoms 3 to 6 cm. wide, of the softest pink, are borne on a stalk 1 cm. long. At full anthesis the sepals are strongly reflexed. The five individual petals are narrowly ovate in shape with a deep cleft or notch at the tip. According to notes on this species by Collingwood Ingram (1948), one of Europe's foremost authorities on the genus *Prunus*, floral color varies in richness and intensity from seedling to
Flower color of the cyclamen cherry varies from pale to rose pink, dependent on genetic variation, from plant to plant. Note the deep cleft on the outer tip of each petal.
This specimen of Prunus cyclamina (AA 11262-2), with a height of 30 feet and a spread of 40 feet, becomes a floral focal point because of its early-season performance and abundance of bloom.

seedling, with some forms being even more richly colored than P. sargentii. He also stated that the tree begins flowering at an early age and flowers freely and dependably thereafter. Our plants at the Arnold Arboretum flower heavily each year, and I have not observed the blossoms to be harmed by frost. However, high wind or heavy rain quickly causes the flowers to shatter, thus ruining the display. As the petals mature and fall away, the young leaves emerge glossy and bronze-red, blending visually with the dull reddish purple of the persistent floral cup and combining to extend a muted but attractive color show for a week or more. As the foliage expands, it quickly changes to the dark green tone of summer. Autumn color is unspectacular and cannot match the rich orange to purple hues of P. sargentii.

After flowering, the small cherries develop quickly and eventually attain the size and shape of a pea. They ripen to a dull purple-red in late June or early July. The tasty fruits are very attractive to birds, but because they are small, with meager pulp, they have little value for human consumption.

Native to Hupeh, Szechuan, and Sikang provinces of the People’s Republic of China, this plant seems to have been discovered in 1889–
90 by A. E. Pratt, who collected it near Tachienlu, Sikang Province, in China, but his specimens were long misidentified. "Prunus cyclamina was first described by Koehne in 1912 from material which E. H. Wilson had collected under his no. 9 on his first expedition for the Arnold Arboretum in 1907. Wilson found the species near Changyang Hsien, Hupeh growing in woodland at altitudes of 3300–4300 ft. and it was introduced into cultivation by means of seeds he collected" (Sealy, 1959).

Two mature specimens of Prunus cyclamina exist at the Arnold Arboretum. One (AA 706–31–B) is located between the pond and the Forest Hills Gate. It was propagated from seed in 1931, and at 49 years of age it is 25 feet tall with a spread of 30 feet. Three large stems and three smaller ones arise from a point about one foot above soil level. The tree displays several large pruning wounds — evidence that it has lost large branches in the past.

The second plant (AA 11262–2), propagated from seed collected from an earlier accession at the Arboretum, grows among the collections of Carya, Ilex crenata, and Buxus near the Centre Street wall. At 51 years of age, it is 30 feet tall with a spread of 40 feet. Branching begins at four feet above the ground, with seven major branches spreading outward and upward from this point. Average new-season growth is 10–14 inches long, with some branches showing vigorous growth of 24 inches. This second specimen is the plant featured in this article.

The tree develops heavy branches that arise with strong crotch angles, and the branches are spaced far enough apart to give a bold visual character to the tree. The branching habit of Prunus cyclamina is a bit more open and slightly more wide-spreading than that of P. sargentii.

The branches are clad in bark that is a dull dark purple-brown on the older stems; the smoothness of the bark is interrupted by rough, horizontal bands and short lenticels. Bark on young branches is a dull reddish brown with short lenticels.

Although the cyclamen cherry has been cultivated at the Arnold Arboretum for approximately 72 years, it is virtually unknown in North America. This author believes that the species may possess the same degree of toughness exhibited by Prunus sargentii and P. × yedoensis, for despite the fact that our cherry collection has declined due to nematodes, viruses, and black knot, these plants appear to be healthy, vigorous, and extremely floriferous.

Cyclamen cherry blooms at the same time as — and can be used to create landscape scenes with — Corylopsis species, Rhododendron ‘PJM’, Forsythia × intermedia cultivars, Cornus mas, C. officinalis, Viburnum farreri, V. × bodnantense, Magnolia stellata, and bulbous plants including Scilla sibirica and Adonis amurensis.

The plants can be propagated by sowing the seeds after three months of cold stratification at 40°F to insure optimum germination.
Grafting has been accomplished successfully using *Prunus avium* as a rootstock and making the graft as close to the soil level as possible.

Cuttings have been rooted at the Arnold Arboretum. Although specific details are incomplete, we do have the following data compiled by Steve Silberstein, a horticultural trainee during the summer of 1978. He took 50 cuttings on June 17, 1978, divided them into five treatment groups of ten cuttings each, and placed them in equal parts of perlite and sand, under mist. On August 8, 1978, prior to Steve’s departure, the cuttings were lifted and inspected. At that time he found that the control cuttings, as well as hose treated with five-second quick dips in a solution of 5,000 and 10,000 ppm. of I.B.A. (indolbutyric acid) in 50% ethanol alcohol, had formed heavy callus tissue but had no roots evident. Quick dips in a solution of 5,000 and 10,000 ppm. of N.A.A. (naphthalene acetic acid) in 50% ethanol alcohol resulted in a high mortality of the cuttings. Vegetative propagation of this species needs continued testing and review.

Hardiness ranges for the species have not been adequately explored due to limited availability and trial. It is fully hardy to \(-10^\circ\text{F}\) \((-20^\circ\text{C})\) and perhaps lower, but it needs further testing to determine the limits of its cold hardiness and heat tolerance. A check of the *Master Inventory of Botanical Taxa* published in microfiche form by the Plant Science Data Center lists only two other institutions that are growing this plant. They are the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois, and the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. At present we know of no commercial sources in North America.

In order to promote testing, the Arnold Arboretum is willing to supply dormant scion wood to interested nurseries and individuals. Scion wood in quantities of 10 scions per request will be available in January and February, 1981.\(^1\) Before receiving this material, you should have rootstocks of *Prunus avium* on hand and forced for grafting by early January, 1981.

GARY L. KOLLER

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**Bibliography**


\(^1\) A charge of $16.00 per package of 10 scions will be made to help defray the costs of handling and postage.
A stout trunk, strong branch angles, and vigor of growth indicate that the cyclamen cherry may be robust enough to be useful in urban landscapes. Note the bands of lenticels that encircle the trunk and stems.