

Juliet Notes: Based on observations in 2008 & 2009

By Bob Bors

'Juliet' (sometimes erroneously spelled as Juliette) was originally released using its breeding number 7-21-32.0 with one propagator temporarily (and unauthorized) calling it 'Bob'. Released in 2004, it was one of 5 advanced selections being sold as a package of 5 for trial purposes. It was formally renamed Juliet in 2006. The whole series are known as the 'Romance' Series.

Productivity

When it was released in 2004 we planted 40 trees each of the 'Romance' cherries and 'Carmine Jewel'. Most of these trees began fruiting in 2008 while in 2009 'Juliet', 'Valentine', and 'Carmine Jewel' had similar yields and are coming close to full production.

Flowers and Cold hardiness

The winter of 2008/2009 caused no damage to Juliet, Valentine and Cupid bushes. That winter was very bad for our Evans which had 80% dieback. Carmine Jewel had minor injuries while injury to Crimson Passion and Romeo were around 15% dieback/ per tree. It was noted that Juliet went into full bloom 3 days before all the other varieties. Blooms was very even across all branches and all trees which further indicates good winter hardiness. Bloom being a few days earlier does mean a degree of risk if a late frost comes.



Figure 1. Juliet flowers



Figure 2. Fully ripe Juliet

Fruit Size and Quality

It is hard to beat Juliet for optimum fruit size and quality. What is optimum fruit size? It is the largest fruit size that can easily fit into a commercial cherry pitter. It reminds me of a favourite saying of mine: What is a perfect grade? 100? No. It's 80. You still get an 'A' but you didn't have to work as hard. Yes, if you get a bigger cherry you are going to work harder if you want to pit it!

While the fruit colour is not as intense as 'Carmine Jewel' it is a deep burgundy red which is much more intense than 'Montmorency', 'Valentine' or 'Evans'.

Every year for 10 years now, Juliet is either the sweetest cherry or a close second to 'Crimson Passion'. They vary from 18 to 24° Brix with lower numbers for wet years and higher numbers for drought years. (1° Brix is roughly equivalent to 1% sugar. Lots of rain during ripening tends to swell the fruit and dilute the sugars at harvest time.). Juliet is usually 4° Brix higher than Carmine Jewel but that is part of the trade off when you have an early ripening variety like CJ. The longer a plant takes to ripen its fruit the longer there is potential for it to gather the sun's energy and build sugar molecules. But there is also a seasonal advantage: later in summer you get cooler nights so sugar accumulate faster.

Also when the fruits dehydrate and look like rasins, they get even sweeter!

Flavour

'Juliet' has most often been called the best flavoured by our visitors when eaten right off the tree. Personally, I like Crimson Passion the most

but that's because CP has firmness reminiscent of a sweet cherry. But I would rate Juliet as a close second. Still others feel 'Romeo' is the best. Much depends on when you eat it and if you are comparing to another variety that isn't ready or one that is past due. But all our cherries continue to increase in sugar levels the longer they are left on the bush.

But we have not done taste comparisons between our cherries when used in processed products. Such tests take time and money and we have been turned down for grants where we wanted to do this. As an aside, our fruit program has never received a grant from any government organization to work solely with cherries. We've had multi-fruit grants to work on a wide range of crops but never been allowed to focus just on cherries.

Some growers have suggested that Juliet might be 'too sweet' to be good for processing. Two master gardeners who were assisting with fruit evaluations surprised me when they insisted Juliet was rather tart and they disagreed with the concept of being 'too sweet'. They pointed out that when you first pop a cherry into your mouth you quickly taste the sweetness, but that if you eat several of the same variety of cherry in a row that the tartness begins to build. They suggested that 'Romeo' was the mildest of the cherries for fresh eating, and that 'Juliet' would be fine for processing.

We had a mechanical harvester (Joanna) harvest Juliet nicely. But it seems to me that its bush was studier than Carmine Jewel and it might need pruning in a few years to keep it adapted for mechanization.



Figure 3. Juliet bushes in their 5th Year with technician Pete Reimer at the U of SK.



Figure 4. 6yr old Juliet bushes at Bruno SK. The fruit is unripe which is why it's easy to see them in this picture.