

Growing Cherries Under Cover
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Parlee Farms grows 10 different varieties of Sweet Cherries on two acres of land. Our soils are mostly Merrimac Sandy Loam over sand or gravel, which is considered excessively well drained. We are currently towards the end of an evaluation to put one acre of this planting under cover.

Following are some of the key observations that have factored into this decision:

1. Cost estimate is \$40,000-\$45,000 per acre;
2. The amount of cracking varies significantly between varieties. Over the last three years, the cracking on Blackgold and Regina has been less than 10%.
3. The bird damage has been less than 5% using the control strategies we use in our sweet corn (squawker and windmills).
4. Bacterial Canker to date has been only a minor issue. We are, however, closely watching this problem as we are susceptible to frost damage at our location in the Merrimack Valley. Frost damage can exacerbate problems with Bacterial Canker.
5. The normal pick-your-own strategy of planting numerous varieties to span a longer season may not be required for sweet cherries. The pyo demand for cherries is such that if we can identify two or three varieties that ‘work’ with our soils and climate, this may be sufficient.

To sum things up, at Parlee Farms we have decided to not cover our cherries – hoping to keep losses less than 10% with the right varieties. As an alternative, we will probably replant 50% of the planting with varieties that have shown minimal losses in our location.