

'Prairie Red' hybrid plum

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Plant Materials Center, Bismarck, North Dakota



Description

'Prairie Red' plum (*Prunus* sp.) is a hybrid plum winter-hardy in the Northern Great Plains. This medium-sized shrub may reach a height of 15 feet on favorable sites. Canopy width increases from root sprouts or suckers and may exceed 15 feet at maturity. Leaves are alternate and simple with sharply serrate margins and prominent veins. Branches are smooth when young, but become rigid and spiny as they mature. White flowers with five petals bloom in May. The flowers are insect pollinated. Fruit that forms in late summer is red or reddish yellow in color. The fruit size may be as large as 1.5 inches in diameter. Variation exists in both plant size and fruit size, with



Blossoms are attractive to pollinators

landscape position having an effect. Plants in lower areas will likely be larger and bear larger fruit. Other characteristics are similar to American plum. Stem density and degree of suckering is generally less than the wild plum.

Uses

Conservation: Prairie Red plum can be included in farmstead and field windbreaks, as well as wildlife and recreational plantings. The plum furnishes both good habitat and food for wildlife, as the plants mature and form a thicket.

Economic: Prairie Red plum provides a sweet, edible fruit which can be made into jelly. Shrubs planted on good sites produce abundant fruit. The large size of the fruit makes it less attractive to songbirds. As the fruit ripens, it tends to drop. If the fruit is to be preserved, tarps should be spread underneath to catch the fruit and keep it cleaner. If the seed is separated from the pulp before it is heated, the seed can be cleaned and sold to conservation tree nurseries.



Fruit is large and sweet

Historical: The Ojibwa knew the wild plum as 'bagesaanaatig', and used the inner bark to dye dreamcatchers. The fruit was dried for winter use.

Adaptation

The wild plum is found throughout most of the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. The Prairie Red plum is derived from vegetative suckers collected at the Wilford Hermann farm near Miller, South Dakota. The plants were grown at the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center in Bismarck, North Dakota. This selection has performed well in extensive test plantings on a variety of sites in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. At a planting near Sioux Falls,

South Dakota, the growth rate exceeded 2 feet per year. The best growth tends to occur on silt loam soils in Conservation Tree/Shrub Suitability Groups 1 and 3. These are similar to Windbreak Suitability Groups 1 and 3. The highest growth rates occur in the first five years. Life span depends on the site, but generally plants will start to die back at 10 to 15 years.



Abundant fruit is produced

Establishment and Management

Nursery-grown seedlings establish readily if planted free of competing vegetation. Bareroot seedlings should be planted in the spring. The optimum spacing is four to six feet between plants. If the plants are to be used for fruit production, ten-foot spacing gives more room and light to each plant. If the lower branches and suckers are kept pruned, it will be easier to gather the ripe fruit in the fall. Rabbits browsing seedling plants can be an initial establishment problem. Control of invading weeds and grasses is important.

Production

The seeds of Prairie Red plum are large, compared to wild plum. There are approximately 600 seeds per pound. Once the fruit is harvested in late August to early September the pulp can be removed using a macerator. The pulp and light seeds will float. The heavier, good seed can be recovered and stored. The seed can be planted in the fall or stratified over winter and planted in the spring. Plum seed requires 6 months of cold treatment in wet peat moss at about 35 degrees F.

Conservation Plant Characteristics

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| Growth Habit | perennial shrub |
| Flower Color | white |
| Foliage Color | green |
| Fruit Color | reddish-yellow to red |
| Growth Rate | moderate |
| Mature Height | 15 feet |
| Anaerobic Tolerance | medium |
| Drought Tolerance | none |
| Precipitation Minimum | 16 inches |
| Shade Tolerance | intolerant |
| Commercially Available | yes |

Availability

Prairie Red plum is available as bareroot seedlings from conservation nurseries in the Upper Midwest. Seed is available from conservation nurseries and the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center, Bismarck, North Dakota.

For more information on the availability and use of Prairie Red plum, contact your local Soil Conservation District or USDA-NRCS office.

For more information, contact:
USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center
3308 University Drive
Bismarck, ND 58504
Phone: (701) 250-4330
Fax: (701) 250-4334
<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>

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