



Planting Guide

Wild Plum

Prunus americana Marshall

Plant symbol = PRAM

Contributed by: USDA, NRCS, Plant Materials Program

Description

Wild plum *Prunus americana* is one of the first shrubs to bloom in woodlands. Its showy white flowers appear before the leaves have unfolded and while woods are mostly bare of foliage. Wild Plum is a shrub or small tree 3-8 m (3-24 ft) tall, and are usually forming thickets. The small branches are sometimes spiny. Leaves are alternate narrow to wedge-shaped, 1-5 inches long somewhat long-pointed, sharply and often doubly toothed. The upper leaf surface is shiny green and the lower surfaces are slightly hairy. Buds are red-brown, mostly about 1/8 inch in length. Leaf scars are not abnormally enlarged. Flowers are white, three-five inch clusters, appearing March – May.

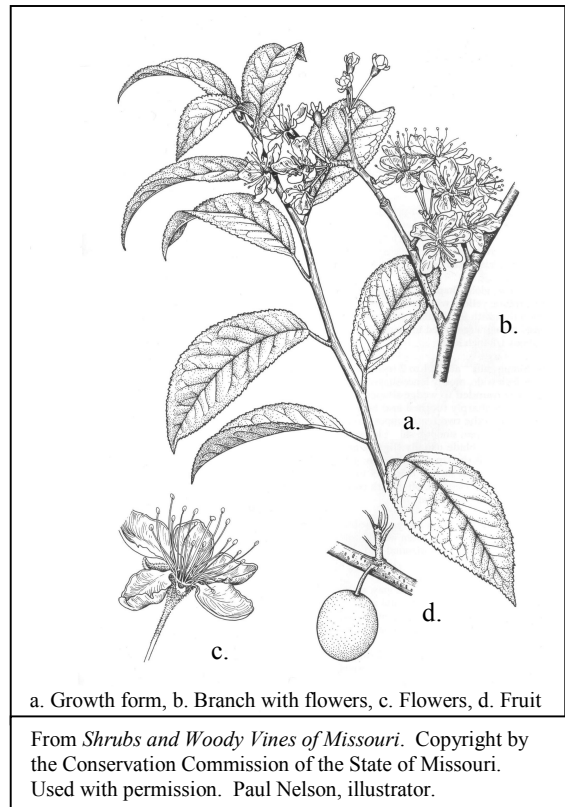
Fruits are red and yellow, usually 7/8 to 1 1/4 inches, seed are somewhat flattened and ripen June – October.

Cultivars

Blackhawk, Hawkeye, and Desoto are descendents of the wild species (Kindscher 1987). Many of the cultivars are from western plains' states, and not many cultivars from the mid-western states.

Source

The following is a breakdown of the locations where selections of wild plum were made:



Accession Number

Location of Collections

9062309

South Dakota

9068484

Ogle County, Illinois

9068546

Dallas County, Missouri

9068545

Phelps County, Missouri

9068580

Livingston County, Missouri

Uses

Wild plum is an excellent species for wildlife food and habitat, effective in erosion control because their roots hold the soil, windbreak plantings, landscape and beautification. Plum thickets often furnish valuable protective shelter. The fruit is eaten by many species of birds, including bobwhite quail. White-tailed deer, raccoons and squirrels eat the fruits. The fruit makes excellent jellies and preserves, or may be eaten raw or cooked.

Adaptation

Wild plum is very winter hardy and has a broad climatic adaptation. It can be found occurring in woodlands, pastures and thickets ranging from Florida to Arizona and New Mexico, north to Massachusetts, New York, Ontario, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Manitoba, Wyoming and Utah. Wild plum grows in prairies, woodlands, pastures, and along roadsides and riverbanks.

Establishment

Seedlings may be planted by hand or with a tree planter. Soaking roots in water an hour or so just prior to planting usually increases survival. If planted in rows where equipment can be used, allow enough room to mow or cultivate for weed control. According to 'Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri', wild plum can propagate by root sprouts to form tickets or a small tree to 20 feet with spreading more or less hanging branches. Space plants eight feet within rows and 16 feet between rows for farmstead and feedlot windbreak plantings. Wild plum can tolerate a wide range of soil types from sandy soils to poorly drained soils. Best conditions are a well-drained soil, sunny site for fruit production; however wild plum can tolerate shade. Flowering occurs from March-May and fruit ripens from August to September. The plant has fruit every year and branches can be pruned or cut back to increase production.

Propagation from Seed: Harvest the fruit in the summer when ripe (the fruit turns dark purple), usually in late August. Remove the pulp or fruit from the seed. Seeds can be extracted by maceration and recovered by flotation. Natural germination predominately occurs in the first or second year after seedfall. Sow the seed in early fall, it is important to sow early enough so seeds can prechill before seedbeds freeze. Seedlings reach suitable size for transplanting in one to two years. Cold stratifying up to 6 months in a moist environment can break seed dormancy.

Management

Weed control is necessary for good establishment and uniform growth. Control weeds the first years by tilling or suppression of vegetation with herbicides before planting, with the addition of mulch/weed barrier mat for weed control. Selective approved herbicides provide good weed control after establishment year; follow the instructions on the label. Protect from 2,4-D type sprays, fires, grazing and trampling by livestock. Plastic netting, irritants or similar protective devices could be used to prevent deer and rodent damage the first five years.

Eastern Tent Caterpillar worms, *Malacosoma americanum*, occasionally infest the prunus species, which if untreated, can prevent flower and fruit production. A severe infestation can defoliate and stunt the plants for the growing season. A recommendation for control measures would be the insecticide Malathion 57 EC liquid. (Follow label recommendations).

Environmental Concerns

Wild plum can spread by seed but mainly by underground roots. It does not seem to spread from its original plantings and when it does spread by seed, the rate is not alarming. Wild plum is cross-pollinated.

Fruit Production

Fruit production of wild plum has been very successful in a spaced plant nursery. In 100 pounds of fruit of wild plum there is an average of 19 pounds of seed. Cleaned seeds per pound averages 870. A matured wild plum tree can produce approximately 100 to 150 pounds of fruit (19-28.5 pounds of seeds).

Plants are available in limited number from the Elsberry Plant Materials Center, Elsberry, Missouri.

References:

Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri; pp. 172-173; Kurz, Don; The Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City, Mo., 1977.

A Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs; p. 310; Peterson, R. T. and McKenny; M. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Mass., 1968.

Seeds of Woody Plants in the United States; pp. 278-280; Schopmeyer, C. S.; Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, 1974

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