



Plum Tree Brochure

Plum trees are popular for the home garden because they do not require as much space as many other fruit trees and they are relatively pest free.

Most plums will produce crops from the fifth year onward.

VARIETIES:

EUROPEAN GROUP

Hardy to Zone 4

EARLY ITALIAN PRUNE	Fruit matures 15 days earlier than regular Italian (mid to late August). Requires a pollinizer. Large oblong purple fruit. Used for fresh fruit, canning or drying.
ITALIAN PRUNE	Self-fertile, large oblong, purple fruit with white waxy bloom on the fruit. Excellent flavor. Used for fresh eating, canning or drying. Ripens in early September. Tree is not large and is winter hardy.
MIRABELLE	Small, round, yellow fruit. Sweet, mild, yellow flesh. Good for processing. Highly esteemed in Europe.
PEACH PLUM	Fruit is large round with purplish-red skin. Flesh is yellow, juicy with good flavor. Partly self-fertile.
BRADSHAW	Self-fertile. Fruit is medium large, purplish-red skin. Fair to good quality. Ripens mid to late August.
GREENGAGE	Partly self-fertile. Fruit is medium size with greenish yellow skin. Good flavor. Good for fresh eating, canning and jam. Tree is small and hardy.
YAKIMA	Very large, oval, red fruit. Flesh is firm, smooth grained, clear, golden yellow.

JAPANESE GROUP

Hardy to Zone 5

GOLD	Fruit is golden yellow. Cross pollination needed with another Japanese variety. Fruit is early to mid season, medium large, fair flavor.
SANTA ROSA	A round red plum of fair quality. Needs cross pollination with another Japanese variety. Good for fresh eating and canning. Ripens mid season.
RED HEART	Fruit is medium large, red skin and red flesh. Good quality. Ripens in late August. Needs cross pollination with another Japanese variety. Tree is upright and hardy. Good for fresh eating, canning and preserves.
SHIRO	Fruit is medium to large, yellow with a pink blush and sweet flavour. Good for fresh eating, canning, and cooking. Needs cross pollination with another Japanese variety. Ripens mid season.
METHLEY	Fruit is medium to large, reddish purple and juicy. High quality. Good for fresh eating or jelly. Self fruitful and will pollinate other Japanese plums.
WARF VARIETIES	Italian prunes can be kept as small trees 10-12 feet tall. Some varieties of plum trees can become large trees.

There is a plum rootstock called Pixy that will give a tree 50% of normal size. Pixy cannot stand drought, so needs to be irrigated regularly.

PLANTING

Select a well grown one or two year old tree from the nursery. Two year old trees should have at least four or five well spaced branches with a good root system. Plant on a site that is not low lying or subject to late spring frosts which could injure the blossom and reduce the yield. Plant trees a minimum of 12 feet apart (3.6m). The usual practice is to plant early in the spring but planting can be completed in the fall, when weather conditions are good and soil is moist. Prepare a hole slightly larger than the root spread. Trim off any broken or injured roots before planting. If the tree is in a plastic pot, remove the pot. If it comes in a fibre pot, you can slit the sides and plant with the pot or remove the pot. Sprinkle a handful of bonemeal (phosphorus) in the bottom of the hole to help the root system get established quickly. Place the tree in the hole. Mix in some peat moss or compost with the planting soil. Replace the soil in the hole, treading the soil firmly around the roots to ensure the tree is firmly anchored in the ground. Give the tree a good watering. An area of about 4ft. diameter (1.2m) around the tree should be kept free of weeds or lawn grass during the early stages of growth. Organic or plastic mulches can also be used to suppress weed growth around the tree.

PRUNING

At planting time, cut one year old tree back to a height of 33 - 36 inches (82.5 - 90 cm). If a two year old tree is planted, reduce the branches to four well spaced shoots and shorten each by one-third. Plum trees are usually grown as open centre trees with the central leader removed. Aim to develop a framework of well spaced branches that are capable of heavy crops without breaking. In subsequent years, build up the framework branches and cut out entire shoots that are crowded or crossing into the tree centre. Narrow angle crotches should be avoided as these are sources of weakness. As fruiting spurs develop, these should be shortened and never allowed to grow long and pendulous. When the tree reaches maturity, aim to remove one-third of the fruiting wood each year. This will ensure a supply of young wood, producing large fruit and will keep the tree compact and manageable.

SOIL AND FERTILIZERS

Soils in the Southern Interior are chronically low in organic matter and nitrogen. Minor elements such as Magnesium, Boron, and Zinc may also be low as well. If good weed control is practiced, no fertilizer should be required for the first two or three years. When the tree starts to crop, apply one ounce (28 grams) of a complete fertilizer such as 12-16-12 (which also contains minor elements) per square yard (0.8 sq.m.). In the fall, nutrients can also be applied as foliar sprays. In mature trees, the aim is to get one foot (30cm) of new growth every year. Organic growers should use approved organic sources.

HARVESTING

For the best quality, the fruit should be left on the tree until it is nearly fully coloured. Several picks may be needed. Ripe fruit should be used immediately.

PESTS & DISEASES

Very little control is usually required. Aphids, mites, and leafrollers may require spraying. Brown rot may be a problem in some years. Check the "gardeners Guide to Fruit Tree Sprays" published by the BC

Ministry of Agriculture and Food, or consult the B.C.M.A.F. publication "Pest Control for the Home and Garden". Organic gardeners should use accepted organic control methods.

Thanks to John Price, P.Ag., Horticulturist