

Plum Tree

Prunus subg. Prunus



General Information

- Edible fruits
- Sun Exposure: Full sun of at least 6-8 hours a day
- Water needs: Moderate, depending on the growth level of the tree
- Cold Tolerance: No temperature lower than 32 F, but needs some chill hours where the ground is below 45 F
- Time to harvest: Takes 10 years after initial planting for plum trees to have the best harvest.
- Harvest season: Late summer to early fall

Planting Guide

Spot Selection:

- Plant plum trees in loamy, well drained soil
- Planting area must reviewed direct sun for 6-8 hours a day
- Find a sheltered location where the trees are less susceptible to frost. So, avoid planting in low areas

Spacing:

- Standard sizes 20-25 feet apart, dwarf sizes 10-15 feet apart

Preparing Container Trees

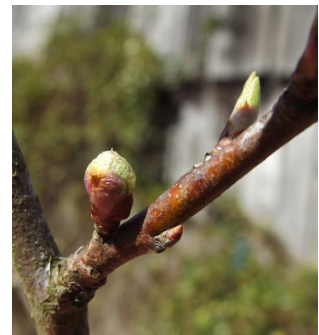
- Remove the tree from the pot and get rid of any tightly circling roots with a sanitized pair of shears
- Try to untangle any loose roots without damaging them

- Dig a hole that's a few inches deeper and wider than the spread of the trimmed and untangled roots
- Place the root ball into the middle of the hole
- Water thoroughly immediately after, to help the soil settle around the roots. In the following few weeks, water consistently every day.

Care Guide

Pruning Guide:

- Prune in early spring to mid summer (March-June)
 - For young trees, prune in early spring
 - For established trees, prune in mid summer
 - Do not prune in the fall, as this can cause infections and frost damage
 - Remove the types of branches listed in the above diagram
- Pruning for the first 3 years:
 - Use a sterilized pruning shear that's been cleaned with bleach wipes
 - Go for a vase like branch structure at the end of pruning
 - Leave 3-4 large branches that come out of the trunk at around a 45 degree angle
 - Doing this brings more light to the center of the tree
 - Cut back central branch (middle of the tree, or the thickest branch other than the trunk) to 2 feet above the soil
 - Utilize the bud structures like the picture on the right → to successfully know where to stop your cuts
 - Second and third years:
 - Cut main central branch back to 18 inches above the healthy bud
 - There should be at least 3 branches below this initial cut: Cut these branches until they are 10 inches, or immediately on top of another healthy bud
- Pruning for mature trees:
 - Prune only branches that have NOT produced any fruit in the previous harvest season last year
 - Remove dead wood
 - Trim side shoots (branches that extend from the central stem) to until they have 6 leaves left
 - Keep the central branching stem 3 feet below the highest branch



Thinning Guide:

- This is the process of removing developing fruit from the tree to increase the quality of produced fruit
 - Done about a month after blossoming ends in spring





- Remove fruits in 2-4 inch increments
- Thinning also helps minimize branches breaking from the weight of the fruit

←Circled fruits should be kept

Irrigation:

- Plum trees do well when they are moist from at least 24 inches below the surface. So, especially during the summer, using a sprinkler to flood the area every 14 to 21 days is enough.
- To know if you've watered enough, take a 4 inch sample of your soil and hold it in your hand. If no water leaks out, it is moist enough.

Fertilizer:

- Once the first fruit has arrived, you can start to fertilize (do not fertilize before this happens)
- Fertilize all year long using one pound of calcium nitrate per tree, or use 1 ½ pound of 10-10-10
 - Cut back the amount of fertilizer used in fall and winter to reduce fruiting

General Care:

- Put some mulch around the tree after planting to reduce weed growth
- Keep an eye out for insect damage by pruning, and install tree guards or fences if you see mouse or rabbit damage

Pest Management:

- Leaf Curl Plum Aphid
 - Cultural Control: managing the aphid population when they first appear
 - Inspect your plum tree in the early spring before the leaf buds begin to open
 - Remove all the aphids you see by spraying the leaf shoots with a strong jet of water from a garden hose
 - On smaller trees, it might be possible to manually remove and crush the aphids while wearing gardening gloves
 - Dormant Sprays: manage aphid eggs that overwinter on plum trees by spraying with horticultural mineral oil
 - Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, safety goggles, and chemical-proof gloves
 - Apply the spray after rainy or foggy weather using a hose sprayer or pump sprayer in late fall or early winter. You can also spray anytime until the leaf buds begin to open
 - Soak all parts of the tree in the horticultural mineral oil solution
 - Avoid applying during rainy or foggy weather, when temperatures are below freezing, or when a tree may be drought-stressed
 - Spraying during the growing season: apply growing season insecticide to manage the aphid population
 - Spray an insecticide before the leaves begin to curl up around the aphids

- The ideal time to spray is either before the tree blossoms or when the petals begin to fade and fall from the tree
 - Ideal insecticides
 - Neem extract azadirachtin
 - Kaolin
 - Pyrethrin
 - Insecticidal soap (may require multiple applications)
 - *Beauveria bassiana* (beneficial fungus)
 - Horticultural mineral oil
 - Ingredients to avoid (damaging to beneficial insects, like bees)
 - Acetamiprid
 - Carbaryl
 - Esfenvalerate
 - Gamma-cyhalothrin
 - Spinosad
 - Zeta-cypermethrin
- Note: You can make trees less attractive to aphids by avoiding heavy watering and over-fertilization
 - Allow the soil surface beneath plum trees to dry out between waterings
 - Only apply moderate amounts of fertilizer ($\frac{1}{8}$ lb of Nitrogen for every year of the tree's life annually to up to 8 years of age followed by 1 lb of Nitrogen annually)
- Plum Pocket Disease (*Taphrina communis*)
 - Spray the affected tree with a dormant-period spray that contains the fungicide, chlorothalonil
 - Wear protective clothing
 - Apply the spray in late winter or early spring before the buds begin to grow
 - If plum pocket disease develops on an unsprayed tree, remove the affected fruit and a large proportion of unaffected fruit to maintain tree health
 - Water and fertilize the tree during the active growing period

Sources:

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