Prunus mexicana
Mexican Plum

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

Growing 25 to 30 feet tall with a spread of 25 feet, Mexican Plum is a North American native tree which forms an irregular canopy composed of yellow/green, shiny leaves with fuzzy undersides and thorny branches (Fig. 1). In spring, the trees are smothered with fragrant, white blooms which are followed by purple/red, juicy fruits. These tart fruits can be used to make jams and jellies. The blooms help make Mexican Plum ideal for use as a specimen tree but it also fits in nicely in the naturalized landscape as an understory tree. The gray/black, ridged and furrowed bark is quite attractive, and the deciduous leaves turn a showy orange color in fall before dropping.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Prunus mexicana
Pronunciation: PROO-nus meck-sih-KAY-nuh
Common name(s): Mexican Plum
Family: Rosaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 6B through 8 (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 30 feet
Spread: 20 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round
Crown density: open
Growth rate: slow
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); obovate; ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green

Figure 1. Middle-aged Mexican Plum.

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Prunus mexicana -- Mexican Plum

**Fall color:** orange
**Fall characteristic:** showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white
**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round
**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches
**Fruit covering:** fleshy
**Fruit color:** purple; red
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; thorns are present on the trunk or branches

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
**Breakage:** resistant
**Current year twig color:** brown; gray
**Current year twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Other**

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest
**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding
**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time
**Ozone sensitivity:** sensitive or moderately tolerant
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

This small tree is well suited for residential landscapes. It might be best to locate the tree back from the edge of a patio, deck or walk since the fruits can be a little messy for a short period in the summer or early fall. When planted in the lawn or in a bed of low-growing ground cover, fruits drop unnoticed and are of no concern. The tree can be a ‘show stopper’ when it is in bloom. It makes a nice tree for planting near power lines due to its small size.

Mexican Plum should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, rich soil but will tolerate almost any soil. It is quite drought-tolerant once established.

**Pests or Diseases**

None of major concern.