**Prunus umbellata**
Flatwoods Plum¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

A native of the woods of the southeastern United States, Flatwoods Plum is a round-topped, deciduous tree, reaching 20 feet in height with a 15-foot spread, that is most often planted for its spectacular display of blooms (Fig. 1). It may look a little ragged in winter. In late February, before the two-inch-long, finely serrate leaves appear, these small trees take on a white, billowy, almost cloud-like appearance when they are clothed in the profuse, small, white flower clusters. These half-inch blooms are followed by one-inch-long, edible, purple fruits which vary in flavor from very tart to sweet. These plums are very attractive to various forms of wildlife.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

| Scientific name: Prunus umbellata |
| Pronunciation: PROO-nus um-bell-AY-tuh |
| Common name(s): Flatwoods Plum |
| Family: Rosaceae |
| USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 9 (Fig. 2) |
| Origin: native to North America |
| Uses: Bonsai; container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance |
| Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree |

**DESCRIPTION**

| Height: 12 to 20 feet |
| Spread: 12 to 20 feet |
| Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette |
| Crown shape: round |
| Crown density: moderate |
| Growth rate: medium |
| Texture: fine |

**Foliage**

| Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3) |
| Leaf type: simple |
| Leaf margin: serrate; serrulate |
| Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); ovate |
| Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate |
| Leaf type and persistence: deciduous |

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches
**Leaf color:** green
**Fall color:** yellow
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white
**Flower characteristics:** showy; spring flowering; winter flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch
**Fruit covering:** dry or hard
**Fruit color:** purple
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown
**Current year twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** none
**Soil salt tolerance:** poor
or street tree, especially for planting beneath power lines or in other areas were overhead space is limited. Few root suckers form on this plant; many form on Prunus angustifolia.

Do not expect a row of them to form a uniform shape. The tree branches low to the ground making it a nice tall element in a backyard shrub border. Lower branches need to be removed in order to train as a street tree. Small-diameter, interior branches can be removed in winter to open up the crown for a more formal, attractive shape and habit. May live 30 to 40-years on a good site.

Propagation is by seed which must be stratified for several months to germinate.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Tent caterpillars occasionally infest Flatwoods Plum.

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Flatwoods Plum thrives in full sun or partial shade on a wide variety of soils. When placed in sandy soil, it grows best with irrigation and some shade in the afternoon. Trees grow quickly when young but considerably slower when mature and bearing fruit. A bit weedy in growth habit, proper training and pruning can create an attractive specimen or small median strip

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 3. Foliage of Flatwoods Plum.