



Prunus cerasifera 'Atropurpurea' Pissard Plum¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Purple-leaved plum has new foliage which unfolds as ruby red, then turns reddish-purple, and finally matures to greenish-bronze by the end of the summer (Fig. 1). Its fast growth rate and upright to upright-spreading nature quickly forms a 15 to 25-foot-tall, dense silhouette. The small, white to light pink, springtime flowers, which usually appear before the leaves unfold, are followed by a heavy crop of edible, one-inch-diameter purple fruits. They make a temporary mess beneath the tree as they mature and drop during the summer.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Prunus cerasifera* 'Atropurpurea'

Pronunciation: PROO-nus sair-uh-SIFF-er-uh

Common name(s): Pissard Plum, 'Atropurpurea'
Cherry Plum

Family: *Rosaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 5B through 8A (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: Bonsai; container or above-ground planter;
shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: generally available in many areas within
its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a
regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more
or less identical crown forms

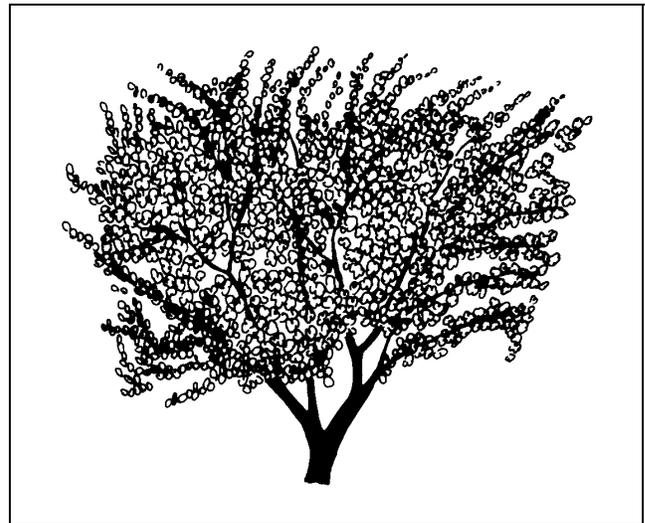


Figure 1. Middle-aged Pissard Plum.

Crown shape: round; vase shape

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: medium

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); obovate; ovate

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches

Leaf color: purple or red

Fall color: purple

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

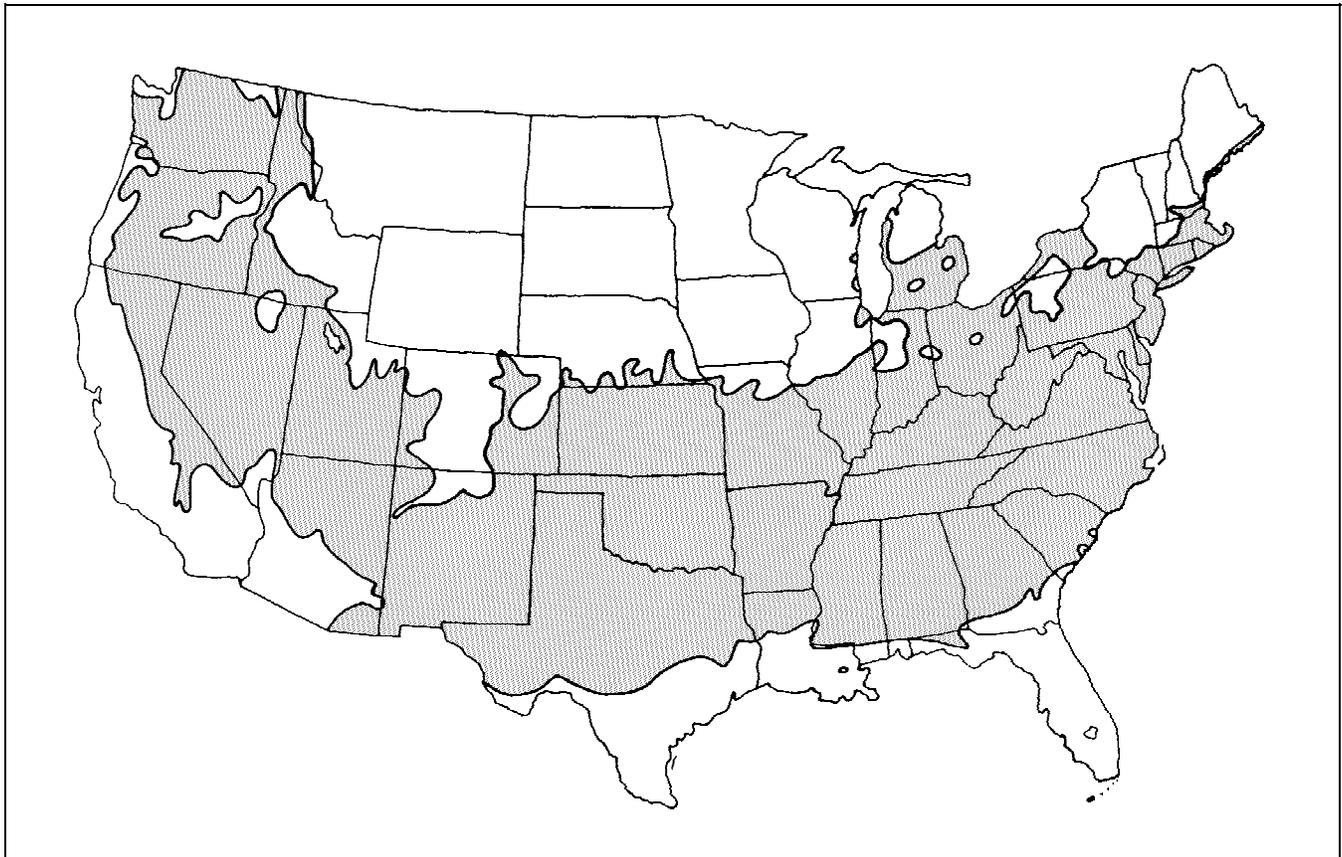


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: pink; white

Flower characteristics: showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: purple

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; 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; reddish

Current year twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt 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

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

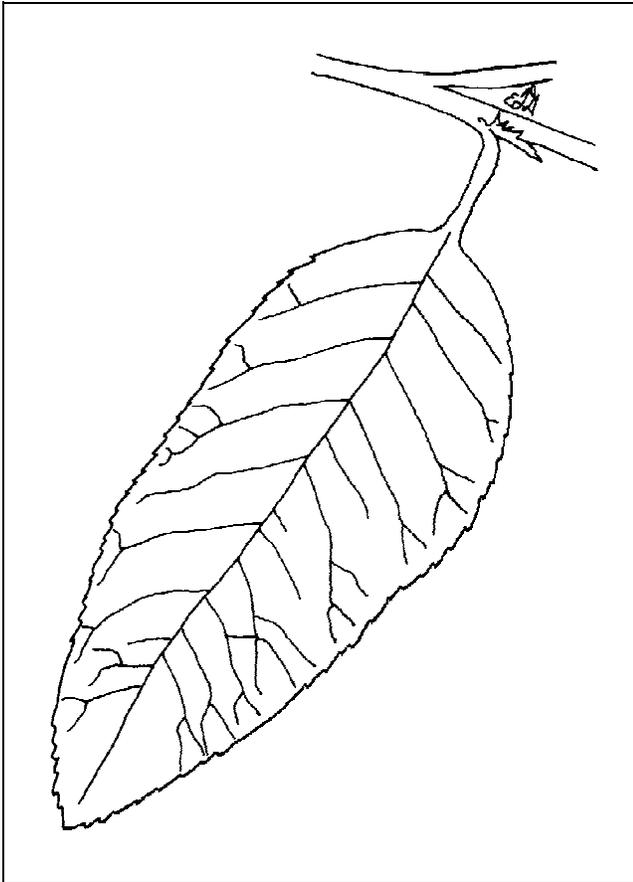


Figure 3. Foliage of Pissard Plum.

Pests

Some of its pests are aphids, borers, scales, mealy bugs, tent caterpillars and many others. This is not a pest-free plant.

Diseases

Pissard plum may be infected with canker and leaf spots.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Very popular due to the unusual leaf color, many gardeners want one of these things in their yard. But one plant really attracts attention to an area, and it can be overpowering in a small landscape creating a cramped feeling. Due to the strong effect, best used in a large-scale landscape as a single specimen, not in a row or mass planting. It makes a nice, small ornamental near the deck or patio but locate it far enough away so dropping fruit will fall on the lawn or in a groundcover bed. Do not rely on this tree to be around for a long time since decline often begins by the time the tree is 10 to 15-years-old.

Purple-leaved plum should be grown in full sun to bring out the richest color of the leaves. Leaves turn almost green in shade and lose the characteristic purple which the buyer is usually looking for. Well-drained soil with an acid pH is preferred but it will grow on slightly alkaline soil. Tolerant of moderate heat and drought, it often succumbs to borers on poor, compacted soil.

Propagation is by cuttings.