

## AMERICAN PLUM

*Prunus americana* Marshall  
Plant Symbol = PRAM

Contributed by: USDA, NRCS, Plant Materials Program

### Alternate Names

Wild Plum, Wild Yellow Plum, and Red Plum

### Description

American plum, *Prunus Americana*, is one of the first shrubs to bloom in woodlands. Its showy white flowers appear before the leaves have unfolded and while woods are mostly bare of foliage. American Plum is a shrub or small tree 3-8 m (10-24 ft) tall, and is usually forming thickets. The small branches are sometimes spiny. Leaves are alternate narrow to wedge-shaped, 1-5 inches long somewhat long-pointed, sharply and often doubly toothed. The upper leaf surface is shiny green and the lower surfaces are slightly hairy. Buds are red-brown, mostly about 1/8 inch in length. Leaf scars are not abnormally enlarged. Flowers are white, three-five inch clusters, appearing March – May. Fruits are red and yellow, usually 7/8 to 1 1/4 inches, seed are somewhat flattened and ripen June – October.

### Status

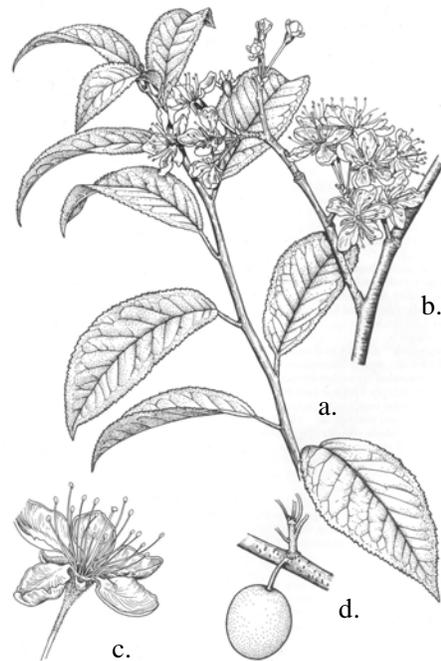
Threatened in the states of New Hampshire and Vermont.

### Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Blackhawk, Hawkeye, and Desoto are descendents of the wild species (Kindscher 1987). Midwest Premium American Plum is a recent release from the Elsberry Plant Materials Center. Many of the cultivars are from western plains' states, and not many cultivars from the mid-western states.

### Uses

American plum is an excellent species for wildlife food and habitat, effective in erosion control because their roots hold the soil, windbreak plantings, landscape and beautification. Plum thickets often furnish wildlife valuable protective shelter. The fruit is eaten by white-tail deer, raccoons, squirrels, and many other species of birds and mammals. The fruit makes excellent jellies and preserves, or may be eaten raw or cooked.



a. Growth form, b. Branch with flowers, c. Flower, d. Fruit

From *Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri*. Copyright by the Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri. Used with permission. Paul Nelson, illustrator



**Weediness**

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, state natural resource, or state agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Website at <http://plants.usda.gov>. Please consult the Related Web Sites on the Plant Profile for this species for further information.

**Environmental Concerns**

American plum can spread by seed but mainly by underground roots. It does not seem to spread from its original plantings and when it does spread by seed, the rate is not alarming. American plum is cross-pollinated.

**Seeds and Plant Production**

Fruit production of American plum has been very successful in a spaced plant nursery. In 100 pounds of fruit of American plum there is an average of 19 pounds of seed. Cleaned seeds per pound averages 1500. A matured American plum tree can produce approximately 100 to 150 pounds of fruit (19 - 28.5 pounds of seeds).

Plants are available in limited number from the Elsberry Plant Materials Center, Elsberry, Missouri.

**References**

Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri; pp. 172-173; Kurz, Don; The Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City, Mo., 1977.

A Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs; p. 310; Peterson, R. T. and McKenny; M. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Mass., 1968.

Seeds of Woody Plants in the United States; pp. 278-280; Schopmeyer, C. S.; Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, 1974

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For more information about this and other plants, contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, or brows the Web at <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov> (Plant Materials) or <http://plants.usda.gov> (PLANTS database)

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