



# Plum

## Plums can weather Wyoming's short growing seasons

Do you enjoy growing, harvesting and eating fruit, yet are a little unsure of what fruit to plant on your property?

Consider plums.

Plums are relatively easy to grow, cold hardy, will tolerate short periods of drought, and often produce a crop in Wyoming's short growing season. *Prunus americana* is a native plum of Wyoming that grows as a large shrub or small tree and produces small, edible fruits.

### Growing and cultivating plums

Cold hardiness and early spring frost periods are the major challenges with plums. Supermarket varieties most often have USDA cold hardiness ratings of zone 5 to 9; however, zone 3 and 4 varieties are better suited for Wyoming. Spring frosts can limit the amount of fruit produced, since plum trees bloom and flower early in the year.

In general, plums are not self-pollinating and require a second tree for fruits to set. Plums benefit the greatest from cross pollination with a different variety or cultivar of plum. Plums are separated into three groups. Proper pollination should occur from a different variety of plum in the same group. A variety outside the group will not provide suitable

pollen for pollination. Several plums are described as self-pollinating yet benefit from additional pollination of a second tree.

Pruning should occur annually. Spurs (flower growth points) on branches 3 to 5 years old are the main source for fruit production. Late winter pruning is best when trees are still dormant. Minimal pruning should occur with young trees but gradually increase as trees mature. Pruning should remove old or dead branches, remove branches to better develop tree structure, and remove suckers and water sprouts that take energy away from fruit production.

For more information related to pruning, please refer to Barnyards and Backyards website, [www.barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://www.barnyardsandbackyards.com), and [bit.ly/osupruning](http://bit.ly/osupruning).

Most plum tree varieties can grow 10 to 20 feet high. Trees should be spaced 10 to 15 feet apart or farther depending on the variety of tree and the desired workspace between trees. Mature fruits vary in size, shape, and color. Colors can be dark to light purple, blue, red, yellow, green, or almost black. The flesh is most often yellow in color but can be shades of green or red.

Fruit thinning may be needed, depending on the success of pollination, for increased fruit size and consistency. Thinning for trees with lots of fruit should occur soon after fruits have started to grow. Fruit should be spaced 4 to 6 inches apart on branches. Trees in wind prone areas may experience significant fruit loss as fruits mature.

### Variety selection

Three groups are used to separate plums based on growth and pollination characteristics: American, European, and Japanese. American and European varieties tend to be more adapted to Wyoming's climate (see chart page 15). Japanese plum varieties are not always well adapted to Wyoming's climate, since most are zone hardiness 5 and greater. There are, however, some Japanese and American hybrid varieties that should not be ruled out for some areas of Wyoming.

### Sourcing trees

Plum trees can be purchased at many local nurseries as potted, balled and burlapped, or ordered as bare rootstock. Well-drained soils are ideal. They might experience root rot if planted in poorly drained soils.

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Soil nutrient management is also an important consideration. A soil test prior to planting can help determine any nutrient deficiencies present in the soil.

Finally, proper tree planting is crucial for the longevity of tree health. More information related to planting trees properly and locations on your property to help promote the health of trees is found on the Barnyards and Backyards website, [www.barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://www.barnyardsandbackyards.com).

Whether eating the fruits of your labor, or eating plums from the market, it is important to know the best ways to select, store, and prepare plums for your enjoyment.

### Plum characteristics

All plums share three common characteristics:

thin skin, a single central pit, and a succulent flesh when ripe. There are few fruits that come in such an array of colors as the juicy, sweet tasting plum. Plums are generally available in the marketplace from May through early fall.

### Nutrition information

Plums can provide nutrients to round out your daily needs. A serving is a whole plum or 1/2 cup cooked plums. Plums are low in calories (30), low in fat, and a good source of vitamin C. This fruit can help promote total nutrition and add variety to meals and snacks.

### Plum selection

A plum is ripe when it yields to a little pressure from your thumb and is



### Suggested varieties

#### American (*Prunus americana*)

- Black Ice (large fruit, dark purple-black skin)
- Underwood (large fruit, dark red skin)
- Toka (medium-sized fruit)
- LaCrescent (medium-sized fruit, yellow skin)
- Pipestone (large fruit, red skin)
- Waneta (large fruit, yellow and red skin)
- American Plum (very small fruit)

#### European (*Prunus domestica*)

- Green gage (small with green skin and very sweet)
- Northern blue (medium sized fruit)
- Hildreth (small fruit, but very sweet)
- Mount Royal (sweet flesh, yellow-green flesh)

soft at the tip. If the plum is too soft, it's probably overripe. Look for plums with rich color and smooth skin, free of bruises, breaks in the skin, and any decay. Many plums have a dusty, white coating on the skin. This coating is called "bloom" and is a natural secretion from the fruit. Bloom is a sign of ripe, freshly harvested fruit that has not been over-handled.

### Plum storage

All plums continue to ripen once harvested. Plums not yet ripe can be left at room temperature. Check daily to make sure they don't get overripe. Ripe plums should either be enjoyed right away or stored in the fridge and eaten within three to five days.

Plums also freeze well. Wash, slice, remove the pit, and store pieces in a sealed airtight container or resealable bag in the freezer for up to six months.

Prunes are dried plums. The term "prunes" is not used as frequently since its name officially changed to "dried plum."

### Taste

In general, a plum is sweet and juicy, with a pleasantly tart aftertaste attributed to the skin. The flesh

texture is firm yet easy to bite. Plums at room temperature taste sweeter and juicier than those served cold right out of the refrigerator.

### Cooking with plums

Most plums are eaten fresh or used in both sweet and savory cooking. If you haven't had plums cooked – baked, boiled, grilled, poached, roasted, or stewed – you're missing out!

Plums prepared for recipes need washed well. To peel plums, cut an X on the bottom of them. Blanch them in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds, remove from water with a slotted spoon, and plunge into a bowl of ice water. Once the fruit is cool, the skin should be easy to remove. If plums are cooked with the skin on, make sure to pierce it.

To remove the pit, start at the stem end of the plum and following the natural indentation, use a sharp paring knife to cut through the flesh to the pit, running the knife all the way around the plum. Gently twist the plum halves in opposite directions until one half comes free of the pit. Remove the pit by prying up the pointed end with the tip of the knife.

Avoid overcooking plums as the flesh breaks down into a purée. When cooking with black plums, the dark skin will give the entire dish a beautiful purple color.

### Ideas for serving plums

Plums shine in many recipes. Try these ideas:

- Beautiful beverages, juices, and smoothies
- Slightly bruised or wrinkled plums for making syrup

- Variety of fresh plums on a charcuterie board
- Bruschetta with plums
- Sliced plums on a fruit or green salad
- Plum yogurt, soft cheese, or sweetened whipped cream
- Plums for fruit salsa
- Over-ripe plums for a chilled plum soup
- A rich glaze or sauce to serve over fish, pork, poultry
- Poach plums in liquid
- Stew for chutneys or use in jams/jellies and preserves.
- Plum butter or plum "apple" sauce
- Pickling plums
- Bake in bars, cakes, cobblers, crisps, crumbles, muffins, pies, and tarts
- Fruit leather or dried fruit
- Grill or roast plums until golden
- Plum sorbet, ice cream, or other frozen treats
- Substitute plums for other stone fruits (any fruit with pit) in dishes and recipes.

Plums add a unique flavor to a recipe whichever way you choose to use them. Get your hands on all these different types of plums and either eat them raw or cook/bake them into luscious dishes.

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