

# PLUMS & PRUNES

## PLUMS AND PRUNES

### In The Home Garden

Horticulture Branch, B.C. Ministry of Agriculture

Plums and prunes are a popular fruit for producing in the garden, being useful for both dessert and culinary purposes. Moreover, the trees can be kept to a compact habit and do not require as much space as a vigorous apple or cherry tree. Most plums will produce crops from the fifth year onward.

#### Varieties

**Gold** - As its name suggests, this is a golden yellow plum, round in shape and of medium size and fair eating quality.

**Shiro** - Very similar to Gold Plum only larger fruit.

**Santa Rosa** - A round red plum of fair quality. Both Gold and Santa Rosa varieties are Japanese plums and need to be planted together to provide cross fertilization. Both varieties will then yield heavily. The trees are early bearing and the fruit matures in mid-August.

**Peach Plum** - Early blue European type plum of fair eating quality and good size.

**Reeves** - Mid to late season plum similar to Peach Plum. Good size and quality, crops well.

**Yakima** - Improved seedling of Peach Plum.

**Bradshaw** - Blue mid-season plum. Good for fresh summer fruit.

**Early Italian Prune** - Greata and Demaris are popular strains of this prune. Good quality plum ready in mid to late August.

**Italian Prune** - The Italian Prune ripens in early September, some two to three weeks after the Early prune. Good quality dessert or culinary fruit if allowed to mature on the tree.

**Damson** - Small rich flavored cooking plum. Not for fresh eating. Good pollinator for other European plums.

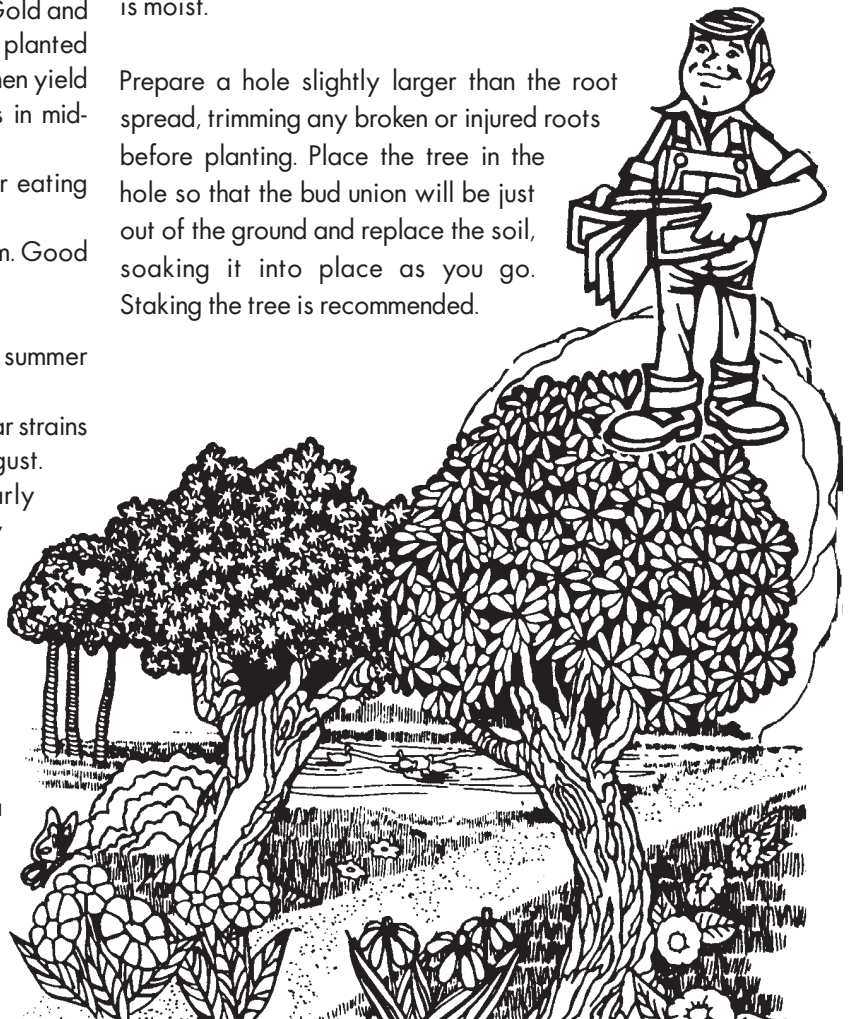
**Opata, Brooks Gold, Brooks Red** and **Pembina** are all North American plums and are for colder areas of the province. They do not do well in warmer areas. You will need two different varieties, or a Sandcherry for pollination.

**Pollination.** Most plums are self-sterile or only partially self-fertile. To ensure regular cropping, plant two varieties from the same group to provide cross

pollination; e.g. **Gold** and **Santa Rosa** or **Italian prune** and **Bradshaw**. **Italian prunes** are partially self-fertile, they make satisfactory pollinator trees and will set adequate crops for the home gardener if planted on their own. However, for full crops, cross-fertilization is necessary.

**Planting** - Select a well-grown one or two-year old tree from the nursery. Two year trees should have at least four or five well spaced branches with a good root system. It is important to select a site that is not low lying or subject to late spring frosts which could injure the blossom and reduce the yield potential. Plant trees a minimum of 12 feet apart, preferably 18 feet. The usual practice is to plant early in the spring, but planting can be completed in the fall when weather conditions are good and the soil is moist.

Prepare a hole slightly larger than the root spread, trimming any broken or injured roots before planting. Place the tree in the hole so that the bud union will be just out of the ground and replace the soil, soaking it into place as you go. Staking the tree is recommended.



## INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE, PLANT A TREE!

**Mulching.** Do not incorporate any manure in the hole at the time of planting. However, applying a mulch of well-rotted farmyard manure or wood shavings to cover an area four feet square around the newly planted tree will help to suppress weeds and keep the soil moist in the rooting zone during the early stages of growth. If shavings are used add extra nitrogen fertilizer to compensate for nitrogen taken from the soil during its decomposition.

**Weed Control.** In the first few years after planting, weed control around the tree is extremely important. A light weed growth in the early stages can cause a considerable check to growth, which is detrimental to the formation of the tree. Shallow hand hoeings or the application of a chemical weed killer will eliminate weed competition. See Bulletin 74-5, Pest Control for the Home Gardener.

**Pruning.** At planting time cut the one-year old tree to a height of 33-36 inches. If a two-year tree is planted, reduce the branches to four well spaced shoots and shorten each by one-third. An open centre or central leader type of tree is optional. In either case the aim is to develop a framework of well spaced branches that are capable of bearing heavy crops without breaking. In subsequent

years, build up the framework branches, and cut out entire shoots that are crowded or crossing into the tree centre. Narrow angled crotches should be avoided as these are sources of weakness.

As fruiting spurs develop, these should be shortened and never allowed to grow long and pendulous. When the tree reaches maturity, aim to remove about one third of the fruiting wood each year. This will ensure a supply of young wood and keep the tree compact and manageable.

**Fertilizer Applications.** If good weed control is practiced no fertilizer should be required for the first two or three years. When the tree starts to crop apply one ounce of complete fertilizer (13-16-10) per square yard to the rooting area each fall. Remember that the roots extend well beyond the branch spread.

**Harvesting.** For best quality the fruit should be left on the tree until it is nearly fully colored, picking over as required.

**Insect and Disease Control.** The most common insect pests of plums are aphids and mites. Silver leaf fungus is sometimes a problem and should be cut out when seen, otherwise the cropping capacity of the tree will be severely reduced.

For additional information, contact your nearest office of the British Columbia Department of Agriculture.

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