

REEMS CREEK NURSERY

Plums & Prunes

Prunus

A Garden Guide

Plums (*Prunus* subg. *Prunus*) have been cultivated for thousands of years in Asia, Iran, and Eastern Europe. Spring flowers range from white to light pink, flesh is firm and juicy, and surrounds a pit. There are many delicious ways to eat plums. For best production and fruit quality, **plant at least two different varieties**, within 50' of each other, for pollination.



Siting: In WNC, our relatively humid climate means that **siting is critical**. Plum trees need plenty of space, with good air flow, in full sun (6-8 hours). Ideally plant them in the middle of a slope. Avoid planting them in frost pockets, at the bottom of a slope. Late frosts can damage blooms. Select for high chill varieties (at least 750 hours).

Soil and Planting: Plum trees prefer a pH of 6.0-7.0, with moist, well-draining soil. A good soil test will tell you exactly what to add, but usually in our soils, plum trees will need at least 1/3rd soil conditioner, up to 1/3rd rich composts, and generous amounts of lime mixed with our native clay. Applying mycorrhizae directly to the roots, just prior to planting, will improve tree resilience. Dig a hole 2-3x as wide as the pot, only as deep as the pot, plant the tree in the soil at the same height as it was in the pot or a little bit higher. Apply 2-3" of hardwood mulch to the root zone, do not let it touch the trunk or any woody roots that might be visible.

Fertilizing: Many options - Espoma Tree-tone® applied in the spring is an excellent choice. Compost tea is a wonderful snack for your trees in the spring and summer.

Watering: Slowly, deeply, and once weekly during the first growing season. Supplemental water will be needed during dry periods - drought can compromise fruit production. Less water will be needed during rainy periods. Remember, too much or too little water can cause significant health issues.

Pruning: Prune for an open center form, to help create good air circulation. Remove any dead and crossing branches. NC State Extension has several videos on YouTube demonstrating how to prune peach trees, which are pruned the same way as plums.

Sanitation: Remove ALL dropped foliage and fruit from your property, do not compost it, lest they be harboring pests or pathogenic fungal spores.

Organic Spray Schedule: Organic products work best as a preventative. With our humidity and pests, it pays to get out there and protect your trees as best as you can.

Late winter - before bud swell - use a Copper or Sulphur based fungicide when daytime temps are 40-45°F (prevent fungal issues), Horticulture oil when daytime temps are 45-55°F with no frost predicted that night (knock back pests that may have overwintered)

Pre-bloom - buds show color but haven't opened yet - use Insecticidal soap (protects buds from newly hatching bud-sucking pests)

Bloom - Apply Nothing!! Bees are providing their valuable pollination services at this time, and must be protected.

Post bloom to fall - scout trees weekly. Use Insecticidal soap for aphids, plant bugs, and stink bugs; Spinosad and/or Bt as preventative for general borers; Copper or Sulphur for shothole and other fungal issues.

Late July through August - Apply Bt weekly OR Spinosad to bottom 3-4' of tree trunks to prevent peach tree borers. Peach tree borers can and do kill plum trees.

Fall - apply Copper or Sulphur (helps to break up fungal pathogen life cycle)

If pest pressures become significant, a Kaolin clay spray, that creates a physical barrier protecting the tree and fruits, may be a wise course of action.

Rotate products to help prevent pests from developing resistance to them.

Sources: ATTRA, NC Extension Service, Reems Creek Nursery Staff Experts, WA Extension Service
Version 2.1 Feb 21

