

# *Prunus cerasifera* 'Atropurpurea': Pissard Plum<sup>1</sup>

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## 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. 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.



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Prunus cerasifera* 'Atropurpurea': Pissard Plum  
Credits: Ed Gilman

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Prunus cerasifera*

**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

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** specimen; container or planter; Bonsai; shade

**Availability:** not native to North America

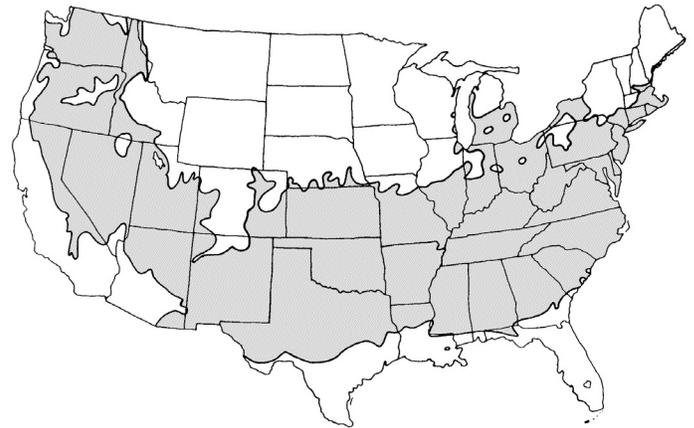


Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 15 to 25 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

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**Crown shape:** round, vase  
**Crown density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** moderate  
**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** serrate  
**Leaf shape:** ovate, elliptic (oval), obovate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate, brachidodrome  
**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous  
**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches, 2 to 4 inches  
**Leaf color:** purple/red  
**Fall color:** purple  
**Fall characteristic:** showy



Figure 3. Foliage

## Flower

**Flower color:** white/cream/gray, pink  
**Flower characteristics:** showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round  
**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** purple  
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** little required  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** reddish, brown  
**Current year twig thickness:** thin  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no  
**Outstanding tree:** no  
**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible  
**Pest resistance:** sensitive to pests/diseases

## 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.

## 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.