

# *Prunus cerasifera* 'Thundercloud': 'Thundercloud' Cherry Plum<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

'Thundercloud' Purple-Leaf plum has new foliage which unfolds as ruby red, then turns reddish-purple for the rest of the growing season. 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, fragrant springtime flowers, which usually appear before the leaves unfold, are followed by a heavy crop of edible, one-inch-diameter purple fruits.

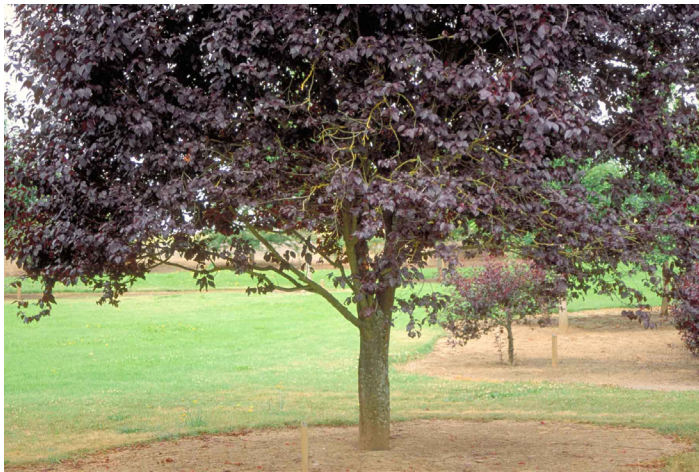


Figure 1. Middle-aged *Prunus cerasifera* 'Thundercloud': 'Thundercloud' Cherry Plum  
Credits: Ed Gilman

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Prunus cerasifera*

**Pronunciation:** PROO-nus sair-uh-SIFF-er-uh

**Common name(s):** 'Thundercloud' Cherry Plum, 'Thundercloud' Purple-Leaf Plum

**Family:** *Rosaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5A through 8A (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

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

**Availability:** not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

1. This document is ENH-668, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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## Description

**Height:** 15 to 25 feet  
**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical  
**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

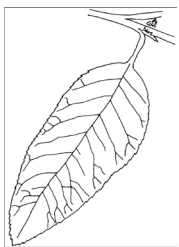


Figure 3. Foliage

## 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; slightly alkaline; acidic; 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-Leaf 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

This Cherry Plum is susceptible to aphids, borers, scales, mealy bugs, tent caterpillars and many others. It is not a pest-free plant.

## Diseases

Canker and leaf spots.