Prunus angustifolia: Chickasaw Plum

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

Introduction
Growing 25 feet tall and wide, Chickasaw Plum forms a rounded mass of slender, thorny branches sprouting from a short trunk. In spring, before the one to two-inch-long leaves appear, Chickasaw Plum is festooned with small, white, fragrant flowers which make the trees quite decorative in the presence of other trees which are often still dormant. The 0.5-inch-diameter fruits which follow are red, ripening to yellow, and are extremely popular with wildlife and man. The plums are either eaten fresh or used to make a delicious jelly.

General Information
Scientific name: Prunus angustifolia
Pronunciation: PROO-nus an-gus-tih-FOLE-ee-uh
Common name(s): Chickasaw Plum
Family: Rosaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 6A through 9B (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Invasive potential: weedy native
Uses: parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; street without sidewalk; specimen; reclamation; deck or patio; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median; Bonsai
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

Figure 1. Young Prunus angustifolia: Chickasaw Plum
Credits: Ed Gilman

Figure 2. Range


2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.
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Description
Height: 12 to 20 feet
Spread: 15 to 20 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: round
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: fine

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate, serrulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: yellow, red
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: thin
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture
Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

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

Use and Management
Grown occasionally with a single leader and used as a street tree, Chickasaw Plum is usually seen with a multiple trunk planted as a specimen or in a median strip, or planted on 15 to 25-foot-centers along the entrance road to a commercial property. It tends to sprout from the base of the trunk, forming multi-stemmed thickets. This is the form most commonly seen in its native habitat on old fields and on other disturbed sites. It makes a nice addition to the shrub border in the back yard and is well suited for planting around the patio or deck although it does not form a neat crown and looks a little unkempt during the winter. The crown often leans to one side or the other. Occasional pruning can significantly improve the form of the crown.

A North American native tree, Chickasaw Plum is very easily grown and has no special cultural requirements. It tolerates drought, sandy or clay soil but does poorly in alkaline pH. These small trees grow quickly but have a relatively short life. This should not stop you from planting the tree since it will serve the landscape well during its life.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases
No pests or diseases are of major concern. Tent caterpillar can defoliate trees and could weaken them with repeated defoliations.