

European Plum

Prunus domestica

Introduction: Native of western Asia, *Prunus domestica* is probably a hybrid between *Prunus spinosa* (or blackthorn) and *Prunus cerasifera* (or the cherry plum), both of which are also documented invaders. Belonging to the large rose family, it is of great horticultural importance and is widely cultivated around the northern hemisphere for its fruit, otherwise known as the plum or prune (if dried). Despite the juicy and popular fruit it produces, *P. domestica* has been flagged as a threat to native ecosystems in the Northwest.

Description: A robust, small deciduous tree, *Prunus domestica* can grow from 15 to 18 feet in height. It has thick, alternate, wrinkled, and serrated leaves that are two to four inches long. They are also conspicuously hairy on the underside and less densely so on top. Young shoots are sparingly pubescent. It bears white or cream-colored flowers that have pubescent stalks and grow to 1.5-2 inches wide. The cup-shaped flowers grow in clusters, for the most part, from short spurs; however they are sometimes solitary or in twos or threes. Fruits vary considerably, but are generally large, most often purple or blue-purple. The seed is a nearly smooth stone that is separated from the flesh of the fruit.

Habitat: *Prunus domestica* grows in woodlands, woodland margins, and tickets. It prefers partial shade or no shade, and grows well in sandy, loamy, or clay soils that are moist.

Distribution: *Prunus domestica* is widely cultivated and naturalized throughout the northern hemisphere. In the United States, it is considered invasive in 17 states, including Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

Reproduction and Dispersal: A self-fertile species, *Prunus domestica* reproduces by seed. It is in flower in April and the seeds ripen from July to November. Birds seem to be the main **vector** of seed dispersal.

Pathways of Introduction and Spread: This tree escapes into wild lands from cultivation by bird-assisted seed dispersal.

Early Detection and Prevention: Care must be taken to avoid seeds escaping from cultivated areas.



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Threats/Impacts: Can grow densely in forest mid-canopies, and shade out native understory species. More research needed.

Management Information: Consider casting a bird-proof net over trees to protect fruit from dispersal. Consider planting native cherries, especially around edges of properties, for bird use.

Research Needs: Impacts and management methods.

Related Species of Concern: These related plants are also flagged as documented invaders:

Blackthorn - *Prunus spinosa*

Cherry Plum - *Prunus cerasifera*

Sweet (or Mazzard) Cherry – *Prunus avium*

Cherry Laurel - *Prunus laurocerasus* (evergreen, shrubby)

Portugal Laurel – *Prunus lusitanica* (evergreen, shrubby)

References

Prunus domestica L., *Plum*. Plants for a Future Database. June 2004. Retrieved April 29, 2007, from <http://www.pfaf.org/database/plants.php?Prunus+domestica>

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