



Arboretum Review



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Prunus

The genus *Prunus* contains many species and cultivars, including both fruits and woody ornamentals. The arboretum's emphasis is on the ornamental plants.

***Prunus americana* (American Plum).** This small tree furnishes fruits prized for making preserves and is also an ornamental. In early May, the trees are covered with a "snowball" bloom of white flowers. If these blooms escape the spring frosts, there will be a crop of colorful fruits in the fall. The trees sucker freely, and unless controlled, a thicket results. The American Plum is excellent for conservation purposes, and the thickets are favorite refuges for birds and wildlife.

***Prunus amygdalus* (Almond).** Several cultivars of almonds—including 'Halls' and 'Princess'—have been tested. Although the plants survived and even flowered, each winter's dieback was so severe that the plants were removed in 1967.

***Prunus* sp. (Apricot).** Several hardy apricots have been planted in the arboretum. These are hybrids involving *P. armeniaca*, *P. mandshurica*, and *P. sibirica*. Some are numbered selections from the Horticultural Research Center, and some are named varieties. These apricots are grown for their ornamental qualities. Selections with pink flowers have greater landscape appeal than do those with white flowers. When the colorful fruits do form, they mature in early July. The fall color of the foliage is a golden yellow.

***Prunus x cistena* (Purpleleaf Sandcherry).** This hybrid, developed by the late Dr. N. E. Hansen, is the most popular shrub having purplish-red foliage in the upper midwest. It is a cross between the native sandcherry, *P. pumila*, and *P. cerasifera* 'Atropurpurea.' The plant grows to about 6 feet tall. The long, narrow leaves are an attractive purplish-red and hold this color throughout the season. The small, white flowers come in May, and the purplish black fruits ripen in August. This plant is growing in our colored foliage collection.

***Prunus davidiana*.** This species is closely related to the peach and is grown both as an ornamental and as an understock. In our trials, this species has not been hardy. It kills back severely almost every winter. Our plants were removed in 1972.

***Prunus x dropmoreana* (Dropmore Cherry).** This hybrid was developed by the late Frank Skinner of Dropmore, Manitoba. He used at least three species in its development. Although the plants have been hardy in our trials, they have little ornamental value. The growth habit is that of a large shrub, growing to a height of 12 to 15 feet. It may have some value as an understock for cherries.

***Prunus grayana*.** This is a large shrub or a small tree, reaching a height of 25 feet. It leaves out very early. By early May, it is covered with large, showy clusters of chokecherrylike blooms. It resembles the Mayday tree (*P. padus* var. *commutata*). Like the Mayday tree, it is subject to black knot disease.

***Prunus humilis*.** This shrub grew to a height of 6 feet and bloomed in early to mid-May. The flowers were small and white with a pinkish cast. The plants have shown varying degrees of winter injury—from none to severe. Our plants have been discarded because of this winter injury.

***Prunus japonica* (Dwarf Flowering Cherry).** This is apparently a variable species. Plants in our trials have shown considerable dieback and have been discarded. This species has been used in breeding at the Horticultural Research Center. Further research is warranted to find hardy forms having desirable landscape qualities.

***Prunus maackii* (Amur Cherry).** This small tree has bright, brownish-yellow bark that flakes off in papery strips. It is particularly attractive in winter when the stems contrast with the snow. The flowers and fruits are produced in drooping racemes similar to those of our native chokecherry. This plant is extremely hardy and well worth growing.

***Prunus maritima* (Beach Plum).** This species is native to the coastal plains from Maine to Virginia. It's a sprawling shrub reaching a height of about 6 feet. It blooms early with small white flowers. Our plants have shown varying degrees of dieback and have been removed for this reason.

***Prunus* 'Minnesota Purple.'** This cultivar was named by the University of Minnesota in 1920. It resulted from a cross between the Omaha plum and *Prunus cerasifera* 'Atropurpurea.' It has never been widely grown as an ornamental. The plants at the Horticultural Research Center have been lost, and those planted in the arboretum in 1959 from the Park Nursery in St. Paul were discarded in 1972. For the first 4 years, the plants showed no winter injury. However as they reached maturity, they began to show considerable dieback. The foliage and growth habit is similar to the 'Newport' plum.

***Prunus munsoniana* (Wild Goose Plum).** This native of our southern states has not been fully hardy. Our plants grew to a height of from 12 to 15 feet, but they showed considerable dieback each spring. The flowers were white, but not outstanding. Our plants were removed in 1972.

***Prunus* 'Newport.'** This was a sister seedling of 'Minnesota Purple' and was introduced in 1923. The small tree, reaching a height of 15 feet, has been widely planted as an ornamental. This is the only plum with purplish-red foliage that has any degree of hardiness in Minnesota.

***Prunus nigra* (Canada Plum).** This northern plum resembles the American Plum. The trees are a little more upright, and the leaves are less pointed. The flowers fade to a pink color. This pink color can be quite noticeable at a distance. This is a very hardy, attractive small tree.

***Prunus x nigrella* 'Muckle.'** This hybrid resulted from a cross between *P. nigra* x *P. tenella*. It was developed by Robert M. Muckle of Clandeboye, Manitoba, before 1949. A single cultivar from this cross was named by the Morden, Manitoba, Experimental Farm in 1952. This small tree is dense and reaches a height of about 10 feet. The flower buds and flowers are a bright purplish-pink color. The plants bloom at a young age. Like many hybrids, no fruits form.

***Prunus padus* (European Birdcherry).** The European Birdcherry and its cultivars would be most attractive ornamentals if not for the black knot disease which is almost always present. The plants are treelike and grow to a height of 20 feet or more. The showy flowers are borne on pendant racemes and open early in May. Another common name for this plant is the Mayday tree. The cultivars 'Abertii,' 'Commutata,' and 'Grandiflora' are very similar. A recent cultivar, 'Redleaf,' is under observation. Plants of this cultivar have not yet bloomed.

***Prunus pennsylvanica* (Pincherry).** This small, native tree has attractive white flowers in mid-May and produces clusters of small, red cherries that are prized for making jelly. The fall color is an attractive red. An upright form has been planted in the arboretum. Several distinctive cultivars have been named.

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Prunus pensylvanica 'Jumping Pond.' This weeping form must be topworked on a standard. The plant's a novelty that's not expected to become a popular ornamental. A foliage problem developed on our plants in summer 1974, and the leaves dropped prematurely.

Prunus pensylvanica 'Stockton.' This small tree has double flowers in which some of the stamens have become petaloid. The foliage is dark green, turning brilliant red in the fall.

Prunus 'Prairie Almond.' This is another introduction from the Morden Experimental Farm. It resulted from a cross between *P. triloba simplex* and *P. pedunculosa*. The semidouble, light pink flowers are borne in profusion in early May. This is a large shrub up to 12 feet tall and is good for background plantings.

Prunus pumila (Sandcherry). This northern species is native on well-drained soils from Minnesota to the east coast. It grows to a height of 4 to 5 feet and is usually open. The white flowers are produced in abundance in early May. These are followed by black, cherrylike fruits in early summer. It has not done well in the arboretum's heavy soils. The variety *depressa* is lower and more prostrate.

Prunus sargentii (Sargent Cherry). This is the hardiest of the Japanese cherries. Our tree has grown to a height of 20 feet in 15 years, but so far we have had no bloom. Apparently, the flower buds are not as hardy as the vegetative buds.

Prunus serotina (Black Cherry). This is a large native tree that reaches a height of 50 feet or more. The flowers and fruits resemble the chokecherry. The bark is dark brown to black, and it flakes off in large patches. This is an attractive shade tree, but birds can cause a mess when the fruits are ripe.

Prunus serrula. It has the most beautiful bark of all the cherries. The color of young trees' bark is a brilliant glossy red. An attempt to grow this species has ended in failure. Three plants grown from seed obtained from Scotland in 1962 were planted in 1964. By 1969, each had died.

Prunus subhirtella (Higan Cherry). This is another native of Japan that is of borderline hardiness. Since our plants have a weeping habit, they are apparently seedlings of the variety *pendula*. The amount of winter injury has varied from none to severe. A few single, light pink flowers have developed, but never enough to make a show. The cultivar 'Hally Jolivette'

is a hybrid between this species x *P. yedoensis*. This cultivar has produced sparse bloom just about every spring. The flowers are quite large and semidouble, and they are produced on long pedicels.

Prunus tenella 'Fire Hill.' This cultivar of the Russian Almond was planted in 1968. The plants have been quite hardy and are now about 5 feet tall. The dark pink flowers are about 1 inch in diameter. They are produced in profusion in mid-May. The plant has a suckering habit which limits its usefulness.

Prunus tomentosa (Nanking Cherry). This very hardy, medium height shrub is excellent for bird food plantings. The white to pink flowers are borne in profusion in early May. These are followed by clusters of small, cherrylike fruits that ripen in early July. The fruits vary in color from white to red. They make excellent jelly, and the juice makes a refreshing drink. The birds love the fruits and usually eat them as soon as they turn color.

Prunus triloba (Flowering Plum). The species was described for a double-flowered form. In bloom, this is one of our most attractive shrubs. During the rest of the year, it has little ornamental value. The shrub, itself, appears quite hardy and grows 10 feet tall. The flower buds are often injured by severe cold. A single-flowered form, *P. triloba* var. *simplex*, blooms most years and produces an abundance of pink blooms.

Prunus virginiana (Common Chokecherry). This large, native shrub grows to a height of 20 feet. In late May, white flowers are produced in drooping racemes. The black fruits make a fine jelly. This species has a suckering habit and forms a thicket. This is a good plant for naturalizing and for conservation plantings. The variety *melanocarpa* from the western states has done well for us and is now about 18 feet tall. The variety *demissa*, native along the west coast, has not done well.

Prunus virginiana 'Shubert.' This purple-leaved form of the common chokecherry is now widely planted. It makes an excellent screen planting or can be trained as a small tree. The leaves are green when they open, but soon turn to a bronzy purple. This makes a good substitute for the copper beech in this area, although it is much smaller.

Prunus yedoensis (Yoshino Cherry). This is still another cherry from Japan that has not proven hardy under our conditions. Dieback has been moderate to severe.

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