

Beach Plum

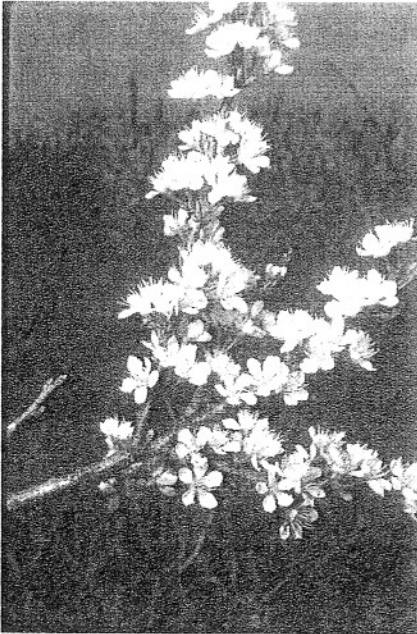
Prunus maritima

By Nod Meyer

FAMILY: Rosaceae

The **Beach Plum** is a pleasant seaside shrub tolerant of both salt spray and sandy soils. It can be found growing in the wild along the coast from New Brunswick to Maryland (Zones 3-7). In early May it smothers itself with clusters of small white flowers, which appear before the leaves. The flowers are typically single, although semi-double ones sometimes occur. The

alternate leaves are 1½ to 2½ inches long. They are green, sharply toothed, and hairy on the underside. The round fruit turns from green to red and blue-black when fully ripe. The wind-pruned shape of the Beach Plum along the sand dunes adds interest to the winter landscape.



Beach Plum in bloom at Galilee.

Photo by Irene Stuckey

The Beach Plum was first cultivated in 1818 for its fruit, which makes delicious jelly—the very best, my grandmother always maintained. Several cultivars have been developed. ‘Eastham’, ‘Hancock’, and ‘Premier’ all have large blue fruit, while ‘Flava’ produces yellow berries. The fruits generally ripen in early September and, somewhat surprisingly, the wonderful flavor of the wild Beach Plum is preserved in the cultivated varieties.

Cultivation

Being members of the Rosaceae, or Rose, family, sun is the first requirement for growing Beach Plums successfully. If grown in poor sandy soil as found in the wild, Beach Plums tend to be rather straggly shrubs about three feet high. However, when they are grown in good garden soil and receive adequate water, they will often attain a height of six to ten feet. With selective pruning they

can be trained into an upright, almost tree-like form. I have seen some very handsome ones that had been carefully pruned, in a manner similar to bonsai.

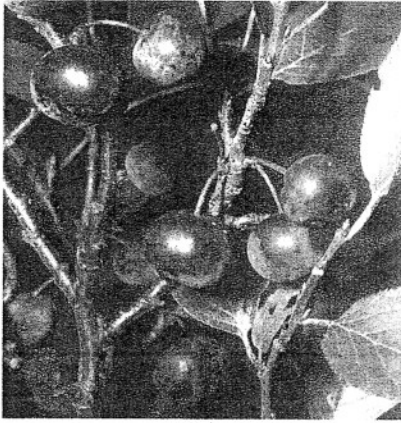
Among the common pests of Beach Plum are the Plum Curculio, *Conotrachelus nenuphar*, both in wild and cultivated specimens and Japanese Beetles. Disposing of fallen plums and keeping the area around the plants clean helps to contain the Plum Curculio. Japanese beetles can be controlled by diligently removing them by hand.

Beach Plum grown in the wild will transplant very poorly. Propagating by seed or cuttings or purchasing nursery stock will assure stronger, healthier plants.

Propagation

Beach Plum may be propagated by seed or by cuttings.

To propagate by seed, first clean ripe plums of all pulp. The seeds can then be sown in a pot or flat of potting soil, spacing them so that they are not touching. They are then covered first with a layer of soil, then a layer of chicken grit about a quarter inch deep. Water well and place the pot or flat outdoors away from direct sunlight until early spring. This provides the two- to three-month cold stratification needed for germination. During long dry spells in the fall or winter, seeds must be watered occasionally. In early spring the pot or flat can be moved into a sunny position outdoors or brought indoors. At this point it is important to keep the soil moist but not wet. When seedlings have emerged and grown three or four inches high (or as the plants begins to crowd against each other), they can be potted up in four-inch pots and grown on.



Beach Plum fruit found growing along South Road, Kingston, RI.
Photo by Irene Stuckey

cuttings in a closed plastic bag and putting it in a north window or other location where it will receive good light but not direct sunlight. The bag should be opened occasionally to allow air circulation. When cuttings have developed a good root system, transplant them into three- to four-inch pots to grow on.

Mid-July is the best time to take stem cuttings for propagation. To propagate, treat cuttings with 8000 ppm IBA-talc or with Rootone⁽¹⁾. Cuttings do best if placed under mist. However, those without misting systems can achieve good results by placing the

RIWPS Policy

Never dig plants in the wild or without the written permission of the landowner.

Take seeds sparingly.

References:

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