

BEACH PLUM



The beach plum, a well-known Cape native, is a shrub with showy white flowers that not only attract native pollinators but also add beauty to the yard. Of course, its edible fruit adds another benefit for us and for wildlife. Although you've likely noticed it on sand dunes out in the wild, it can grow even better when moved into your garden. The white flowers bloom from May to June.

ENJOYING THE FRUIT

Because beach plums are known to be a bit sour, many people turn them into jelly. Generations of Cape Codders have followed the tradition of seeking out the bushes in spring, when they can be easily identified by their plentiful flowers, and then making their way back in late summer to pluck the fruit. Having a bush in your yard can help you identify the right time to go foraging in the wild for more plums!

If you're looking for more options besides jam, Edible Cape Cod magazine has some beach plum recipes you could try (including sorbet!):

<https://ediblecapecod.ediblecommunities.com/recipes/re-awakening-tradition>.

CHOOSING A SITE

Plan for this woody shrub to get about 6 feet tall and 6 feet wide when fully grown. It enjoys full sun and well-drained soil with a neutral pH of 6–7.

PLANTING

Space out the plants so they're about 5 feet apart; you can plant them closer if you are trying to create a hedge.

TAKING CARE: WATERING, FEEDING, PRUNING

In the first year, water weekly. After that, you'll need to water only occasionally, when there are drought conditions.

This shrub needs minimal fertilizing, but a shovelful of compost can provide extra nutrients that will increase fruit production.

Occasionally prune to remove dead and diseased wood and to increase air circulation. Prune out the oldest branches to encourage new growth. Cornell University and Cape Cod Cooperative Extension have teamed up to provide a great online month-by-month task list for taking care of your beach plum shrub:

<https://blogs.cornell.edu/treefruit/production/beach-plum/how-to-grow-beach-plums/>.

AVOIDING PESTS AND DISEASE

All pests that will affect plums will also affect the native beach plum. If you've noticed any disease, raking up leaves each fall under your bushes to remove sources of pathogens can help keep your shrubs healthy.



HARVESTING

The fruits are ready to pick at about mid-August through mid-September. They are a dark purple when ripe and are about the size of a grape and have a pit in the center. You will need about 8 pounds for a batch of jam.

RESTORING WILDLIFE HABITAT

The beach plum is an important pollinator plant. Native bees and other pollinators will visit beach plums for pollen and nectar. Many birds and mammals depend on beach plums for a food source as well.

