

Plums

Bob Brown, Fladbury, Worcestershire

I asked a commercial plum grower why Worcestershire is historically so important for plum growing. The answer was surprising and understandable. **"The county, especially the Vale of Evesham is colder than the rest of England and is colder for longer. This delays flowering so that the infant plums avoid late frosts. It doesn't always work."**

Having land in Worcestershire breeds an intrinsic curiosity about plums because **they're everywhere, on roadsides, in hedges, and in woods.** This includes domestic varieties and wild species. In late winter the district erupts with flower which continues into spring.

Prunus domestica – the plum. These delay flowering till spring and the fruit matures from as early as late June to September. Greengages belong to a subspecies - *italica*.



Prunus domestica 'Victoria'



Prunus domestica italica

Prunus insititia – damsons (subsp. *damascena*), bullace (subsp. *nigra*), mirabelles (subsp. *syriaca*). These also delay flowering till spring and the fruit matures in August (bullace), September (damsons) and October (mirabelles). Damsons (called damascenes locally) are less round than bullace but otherwise similar.



Prunus insititia damascena



Prunus insititia nigra



Prunus insititia syriaca



Prunus cerasifera – cherry plums, myrobalans. These are the earliest to flower in late winter and have attractive shiny bloom-free fruits best eaten before they're ripe in August because the flavour diminishes upon ripening. One kind – 'Pissardii' with red leaves and pink flowers is grown as an ornamental.



Prunus cerasifera 'Pissardii' in blossom and fruit



Prunus spinosa – blackthorn, sloes. Suckering buggers. These flower early but not as early as cherry plums. The abundance of white blossom has led to the saying "Blackthorn winter" – a saying that has nothing to do with temperatures. October is the month to pick them. Sadly, you have to buy the gin.