

Wilding *Prunus* species



Identification

- Mostly small to medium-sized deciduous trees
- Lance-shaped to oval leaves
- White to pink coloured flowers
- Lots of cultivars are double flowered
- Flowers have five petals (similar to a briar rose flower) and grow in clusters of two or more
- Fruit either typically cherry or plum-shaped containing one hard seed/stone.



Double flowered cultivar of *Prunus serrulata* Photo: M. von Tippelskirch (ECan)



Wilding *Prunus* species (single flower) Photo: Weedbusters

Where are they found?

Prunus species are grown domestically for fruit production or as ornamentals in orchards, gardens, parks, and in arboretums. They can also be found growing wild in native forests, tussock grasslands, scrub, shelterbelts and along roadsides and waterway margins.

Why are they a problem?

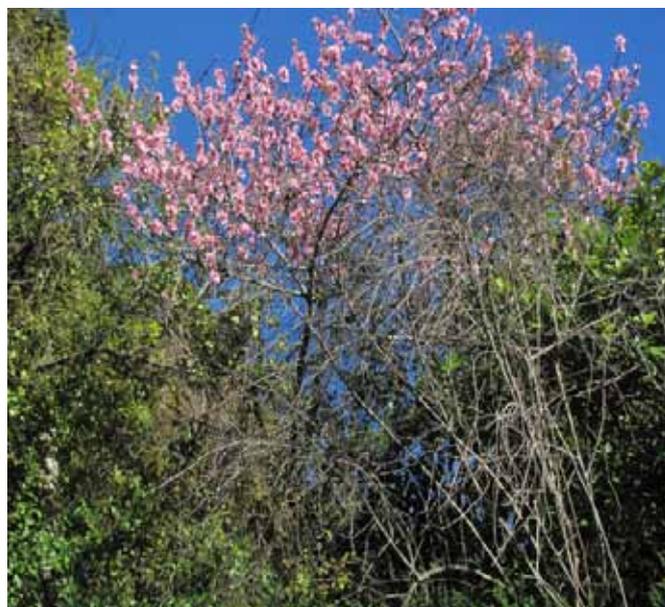
Birds can spread *Prunus* fruit to places further afield where wilding plants may be difficult to control. Wilding *Prunus* species are fast-growing and can crowd and shade out smaller plants growing beneath them, in turn altering native plant communities. Some wilding *Prunus* species are also capable of spreading via suckers.

Fruit from wilding *Prunus* trees grown from seed usually have no commercial value because they are very small and tart-tasting. Fruit from some *Prunus* species may be eaten but leaves, seeds/stones and other parts of *Prunus* species may be toxic.

Control

To help prevent birds spreading *Prunus* fruit from the home garden or orchard, cover fruiting trees with bird netting. Control suckers by mowing under trees or by pruning them off. Small seedlings can be pulled out by hand. For wilding *Prunus* species, cut stumps near ground level and paint with an appropriate herbicide. After initial control, monitor the site for regrowth for at least two years.

Use all herbicides in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and ensure no herbicide comes into contact with other plants, the soil or waterways.



Prunus serrulata growing amongst native bush Photo: M. von Tippelskirch (Ecan)

Examples of *Prunus* species that can be found growing in the wild

Prunus avium Sweet cherry

- Deciduous, long-lived tree up to 12 m tall
- Produces suckers
- Red to black fruit in late spring to early summer
- Leaves on long petioles (12–60 mm); red glands on leaf petiole
- Bark smooth, purplish-brown
- White flowers (September to November)



Prunus avium flowers Photo: M. von Tippelskirch (Ecan)



Prunus serrulata leaves and fruit Photo: Weedbusters

Prunus cerasifera Cherry plum

- Deciduous large shrub or small tree up to 8 m
- Green or sometimes purple leaves
- Leaves on a very short petiole (6–12 mm)
- Branches have dark, rough bark and spines
- Small, round, yellow, red or purple fruit
- Fruit contains a pointed, rough stone
- White flowers (earliest flowering of all *Prunus* species)



Prunus cerasifera branch showing spines Photo: M. von Tippelskirch (Ecan)



Prunus laurocerasus in flower Photo: Weedbusters

Prunus laurocerasus Cherry laurel

- Evergreen
- Long-lived shrub or tree up to 10 m tall
- 20–30 small, fragrant, greenish-white blossoms on erect flower-spike (August to September)
- Grape-like clusters of dark purple to black fruit (November to January)