

Prunus x cistena - Purpleleaf Sand Cherry (*Rosaceae*)

Prunus x cistena is a small shrub known for its upright and spreading habit and red-purple to maroon foliage that does not fade much during the summer. Purpleleaf Sand Cherry has white-pink solitary spring flowers directly pendulous from the previous year's wood.

FEATURES

Form



- medium shrub
- to 8' tall x 8' wide
- upright oval, spreading with age
- rapid rate

Culture

- full sun to partial shade
- urban tolerant in general, especially drought hardy
- serious pest and disease problems plague cherries (aphids, borers, cankers, leaf spots, etc.)

Foliage

- emerging bright reddish-purple and remaining crimson-purple throughout most of the summer, slowly changing to a bronzy-green autumn color
- leaves are alternate, elliptical, serrated, about 2" long, and with dual glands at the top of the young petiole
- foliage will change quickly to bronzy-green in summer if it is sited in a semi-shady spot

Flowers

- white-pink
- Apr.
- solitary and directly pendulous from previous year's wood
- emerging with the foliage as pink buds

Fruits

- black-purple
- July
- the few that are present are not effective and seldom noticed, due to small size and poor contrast with the purple foliage

Twigs

- red-brown, becoming dark gray with age
- rapid growth at apex and from basal suckers
- medium growth elsewhere
- buds small
- stems and branches lenticeled



Trunk

- multi-branched from base
- gray to gray-brown
- prone to fissures that ooze sap

USAGE

Function

- specimen shrub, borders, entranceways, formal or informal hedges

Texture

- medium texture in foliage and when bare
- average density in foliage and when bare

Assets

- maroon to red-purple foliage all spring and most of the summer
- spring white-pink flowers emerging with the foliage
- rapid growth

Liabilities

- most cherries and plums are subject to cankers, borers, and frost cracks (leading to cambial necrosis and wood rotting) and caterpillars, Japanese beetles, and other insects (leading to defoliation and leaf cosmetic unsightliness), and as a result are often dead after 10-20 yrs. of growth

Habitat

- Zone 2
- Native to Western Asia and the Caucasus

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- red-, maroon-, or purple-foliaged shrubs (*Berberis thunbergii* cultivars, *Cotinus coggygria* cultivars, etc.)

Cultivars - Variants - Related species

- Prunus x cistena* 'Big Cis' - a more vigorous form that yields a 15' tall single- or multi-trunked small ornamental tree
- Prunus cerasifera* - Cherry Plum - one of the parents in the hybridization of *P. x cistena* (the other is *P. pumila*)
- upright tree to 25' x 20'; noted here because its many cultivars ('Newport' is the most cold hardy, to zone 4) make it one of the premier purple-foliaged trees, slowly fading to purple-green as the summer progresses; like most *Prunus*, it has a functional life of 20 yrs. or less due to serious disease and pest problems