

# New York Plum Picks for 2006: Recommended Plum Cultivars

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Over the last 30 years, researchers at the NY State Agricultural Experiment Station and Extension field staff have conducted field evaluations and pilot processing tests of hundreds of plum selections and cultivars. This effort has resulted in a list of recommended varieties. The list is categorized into four plum types including Japanese types, European blue plum types, Greengage types and Mirabelle types. Within each category varieties are listed in order of maturity. A brief characterization of general attributes of each broad category is presented. Most of the recommended varieties are available from commercial nursery sources. If you can't find a nursery source, the Geneva Experiment Station may be able to provide a limited supply of virus indexed budwood so that you can arrange a contract with a nursery to have trees grown specifically for your needs.

## Japanese Plum Types

Japanese plums bloom earlier than any others, thus they are more frost susceptible and their trees are generally less tolerant to winter cold than most European plums. This list spans a harvest period of 7-8 weeks from mid-July to mid-September.

**Ohishi Wasi** – the earliest ripening plum at Geneva, and one with a long history of success in Japan and Korea. Fruit is larger than that of Early Golden. The tree is hardy enough to be grown in NY if peach trees flourish on the site. It has a blushed red cheek over golden ground color and good eating quality for this early season, and is self-incompatible.

**Early Golden** – A mid-July plum in Geneva. Well known in the Great Lakes regions as one of hardiest trees that will produce regularly in cold climates and start harvesting before Methley or Shiro. It needs multiple pickings and gets very little blush and has bland flavor if over-set. Biennial fruiting pattern is common if over-cropped. Needs a pollinator and Burbank, Ozark Premier, Shiro and Vanier all pollinate it well.

**Methley** – This round purple plum, with red flesh and small to medium size, ripens between Early Golden and Shiro. Quality is mediocre and some find the flavor objectionable, particularly the bitterness in the skin. It is self-fertile and has a hardy tree. Needs multiple pickings. *Doubtful value for farmstands that wish to emphasize high quality.*

**Early Magic™** – A new sport, possibly of Santa Rosa, found in Niagara County, NY and offered for trial by Hilltop Nursery, Hartford, MI. Outstanding fruit color (bright red/purple with golden flesh), taste and texture are both very good for an early plum ripening about Methley season. Handling characteristics are good - the big question is whether the tree is hardier than Santa Rosa (which is marginal for many sites in NY). Although we know cross pollination is necessary, we do not know which specific pollinizers will work. It has set crops very well when Ozark Premier, NY 1502, and Fortune are its closest neighbors in Geneva.

**Shiro** – Ripens 10 to 12 days after Early Golden in Geneva. Well known as all-yellow fruited sort with hardy tree. Self-incompatible. Pollinated by Burbank, Methley, Vanier and probably by

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**Obilinaya** – We have limited experience with this hybrid from the former USSR. It has outstanding fruit size, a beautiful red-purple appearance with bright red flesh under the skin and golden flesh around the pit. The tree is very hardy and an extremely heavy cropper. It will mature fruits that are uniformly nearly 2" with good flavor. It ripens between Methley and Shiro. No pollination data available for it yet. It has a tendency to over-set. In this case, fruit quality will be mediocre without thinning.

**Ozark Premier** – This hardy, spreading tree is often very biennial in its cropping pattern. Its fruit is very large and well colored with good flavor if it is thinned. It requires a pollinizer and Early Golden will not pollinize it. Vanier and Myroblan rootstocks (that have been allowed to flower and fruit instead of being grafted) are both excellent pollinators. Obilinaya probably is too because of its parentage being one-half Myroblan.

**Burbank** – This hardy, dependable-cropping old variety is valuable as a pollinizer in any Japanese-type plum orchard. It needs careful hand thinning in most seasons to make adequate fruit size. The red-skinned variety with yellow flesh

has good flavor if not too heavily cropped. The fruit ripens in late August in Geneva. It is self-incompatible, but is a good pollinizer for many other varieties.

**Vanier** – This hardy, upright growing tree sets an adequate crop of firm, bright red over golden ground color fruit with yellow flesh. It is medium-sized, similar to Shiro. It is self-incompatible and ripens with Burbank, between Ozark Premier and Fortune. It hangs on the tree and stores very well. It is readily pollinated by Burbank and Ozark Premier.

**Ruby Queen** (=BY 8155.70) – This tree has medium large fruit with dark red to reddish-black skin, covered with waxy bloom. The flesh is also dark red with firm texture and outstanding flavor. It has high sugar and enough acid for good balance. It is probably self-incompatible. In the 2003-04 winter in Geneva, NY our nine-year old trees died. Our younger trees survived the 2003-04 winter but then died. (USDA,ARS, 2004).

**Fortune** – This variety produces the largest fruit of the varieties listed here. It has red/purple skin, yellow flesh and ripens around Labor Day in Geneva. The tree is vigorous and somewhat upright and similar to Ohishi Wasi in hardiness. It should not be tried in regions that do not have success with growing most peach varieties. It is self-incompatible and pollinated well by Burbank.

### European Blue Plum Types

This group of blue and purple/blue plums formerly known as “prunes” spans an eight-week ripening period from early August to late September. Many shapes, flavors and textures are represented. Good eating quality, regular cropping and good tree longevity were the primary traits used as a basis for their recommendation.

**Ersinger** – This ‘German Prune’ style of fruit (meaning that it is oblong to oblong-pointed and has blue skin) has very good flavor. It ripens in very late July or early August in Geneva, amongst the earliest blue plums. It crops heavily and retains its flavor very well but is not firm enough to ship.

**Earliblue** – Similar to Ersinger in size and shape, it has darker blue color and slightly blander flavor. It is not firm enough to ship.

**California Blue** – This is a round, medium large, unevenly shaped blue plum that sizes well but tends to drop. It ripens three days after Shiro. Flavor is satisfactory but uneven maturity and drop may make it troublesome to grow.

**Valerie** – This is a Vineland, Ontario selection. It ripens with California Blue and is about 3 days after Shiro. It is self-incompatible and pollinized by Vanette and Valor. This variety is firm enough to pack and ship to wholesale markets.

**Vanette** – This is another Vineland, Ontario selection. It ripens in early August in Geneva. This blue plum with a nice flavor can overset and be small. This variety does not drop. It needs a pollinator and Stanley and Valor both work. Vanette pollinates Valerie but Valerie will not pollinate Vanette.

**Voyageur** – This round, oblong-shaped fruit has a sky-blue color due to heavy covering of waxy bloom which gives fruit a distinctive appearance. It ripens shortly before Early Italian and Castleton™. It crops abundantly and regularly but has a tendency to drop and it softens more quickly than Castleton™ and Early Italian. It is self-compatible and is a good pollenizer for Early Italian. It has good eating quality and is firm enough to pack and ship to wholesale markets.

**Bluebyrd** (=B69158) – The fruit is medium size, with deep purple skin with a waxy bloom. The flesh is amber, firm and clings slightly to the stone. The flesh has a good sugar/acid balance. The tree has good hardiness and is more consistently productive than many other blue plums. In some years without fruit thinning, it may break limbs with fruit weight. Bluebyrd is self-incompatible (Scorza and Fogle, 1999).

**Early Italian** – This well-known variety of blue plum is also known as “Early Fellenberg” and has outstanding fruit quality. It is not self-fertile and sets lighter crops than Castleton™. This variety is also firm enough to pack and ship to wholesale markets.

**Castleton™** – This release from Cornell sets exceptionally heavy crops of medium size, dark blue-purple plums that are very uniform in size and appearance. It is excellent for fresh use but colors early and is often picked before

mature. This variety should replace Early Italian. It is self-fertile and heavier yielding. The tree is moderately vigorous and should be grafted on a full-vigor rootstock such as Myroblan or one of the Marianna stocks. This variety is firm enough to pack and ship to wholesale markets.

**Seneca** – This variety was released by Cornell in 1972. The fruit has a maroon/purple skin color, oblong shape with size often one and one-half inches thick and 2 inches long. Its eating quality is unsurpassed! It needs pollination.

**NY 6™** – This Cornell selection has recently been released. It is a dual purpose plum that ripens before Stanley and Italian Prune and crops regularly and heavily. Fruit size is larger than its sister, Castleton™, but it can be bland when it crops most heavily. Infant food trials have been exceptionally favorable compared to Stanley because of better color retention in processed products. It is partially self-fertile.

**Longjohn** – This Cornell release of 1993 is now gaining a reputation for its larger, very oblong, blue fruit that have very good quality and texture. The tree is more vigorous than Stanley and tends to self-thin and achieves uniform fruit size. A pollinizer is required. Longjohn’s fruit is firm and well suited for packing and shipping.

**NY 9™** – This Cornell selection was released along with NY 6™. It is a Stanley replacement with dual purpose uses. Its pit is free and non-shattering. Fruit quality is exceptionally good for both fresh and processing. Yield, size and ripening times are all similar to Stanley. The tree is more upright and more vigorous than Stanley or NY 6™ and it is self-fertile.

**Cacak’s Best** – This plum was bred at the Cacak Station in the former Yugoslavia. It is a cross between Wangenheim’s Fruhwetsche x Pozegaca. It is a medium large blue plum, which is freestone. The skin has a heavy bloom and the flesh is pale yellow. Full ripeness is not attained until a week or more after the blue color is well developed. At full ripeness the astringency is pleasant – comparable to Italian. This variety is self-sterile with good resistance to the plum pox virus. It produces a healthy tree with an open crown (Fischer, 1995).

**Empress** – The fruit is large, oval to pointed, and oblong, with dark blue skin. It is free to partially freestone and non-shattering. The neck shrinks in dry seasons and can break down prematurely. In most seasons it is the best fresh market packing plum in Geneva's trials. The tree is vigorous, somewhat upright and regularly productive if pollinized well. It blooms mid-late and is self-incompatible. It can be pollinized by Stanley, Victory, Moyer, French Prune and Damson. According to the first year's results in an Empress pollination trial, Damson is the most effective pollinizer. Undoubtedly many other blue plum varieties will pollinize it. In Geneva it ripens in late September. The fruit is firm and well-suited for packing and shipping.

**Italian Prune** – This very well-established variety is also known as Fellenberg. It is an important variety with diverse uses – fresh, canning, and drying. Light fruit set in New York limits its value here. Autumn Sweet seems much better. Its fruit is firm and well suited for packing and shipping.

**Valor** – This is a medium size, blue skinned variety with amber flesh of good

eating quality. It ripens in the third week of September in Geneva. The tree crops regularly, is somewhat thorny, and has moderate vigor with spreading habit. It is self-incompatible and is pollinized effectively by Stanley, Italian Prune and LongJohn. This fruit is firm and well suited for packing and shipping.

**Pozegaca** – This is an old and famous variety from Eastern Europe with high quality and many uses. One of the more common synonyms is Hauszwetsche. In Eastern Europe it has many clones, which have been developed over centuries. Most of the types we have seen in Geneva have small to medium sized fruit with a blue skin and a waxy bloom. The flesh is firm, greenish or amber with high sugar and a good acid balance. Most types have a pleasant level of astringency, similar to Italian. The pit separates easily. It is self-fruitful with an upright tree form. In most seasons the fruit hangs quite well on the tree for several weeks after maturity. This variety is very susceptible to the plum-pox virus. In Eastern Europe it is used for many processing purposes including preserves and brandy. We made a nice preserve from it in 2003.

**Autumn Sweet** – This variety was recently released by Washington State University. Its fruit quality surpasses that of Italian Prune and it yields much better than Italian. It is partially self-fertile and always sets well in Geneva in the company of Stanley and NY 9™. Autumn Sweet's fruit is firm and well-suited for packing and shipping. They are medium size and have an attractive dark blue skin color.

**President** – This is a medium large oblong plum with skin color like Valor, reddish blue, and dark yellow firm flesh. It is both crisp and sweet with good acid balance and a slight bit of astringency. It ripens in late September and is not as large as Empress. It pollinizes Empress very well and vice versa.

### Greengage Plum Types

These are also known as Reine-Claude types and date back to their introduction from Armenia into France at about 1500 A.D. Usually they have small, round, generally green, yellow or blushed fruit with special flavors/aromas that are highly prized by connoisseurs. Usually they have softer flesh texture than most

other European-type plums. It is their distinct Gage-flavor that sets them apart as a category of unique plums. David Karp had a very good article about the French Greengage industry published in the New York Times on September 1, 2004. This article makes it clear that niche markets for this delectable plum are available for those who have the patience to deal with its vagaries of cropping, cracking and rot in rainy years.

**Oullins Gage** – These 1-1/2” fruit have yellow skin and flesh. The flavor is very good yet not as aromatic as Greengage. Trees are highly productive, and not prone to biennial bearing. It is more vigorous than Greengage, Stanley or Italian Prune. It blooms later than most Gage plums and is self-fertile. Brown rot can be a serious problem if multiple pickings are not made to keep ripe clusters open. The fruit starts to ripen in the first half of August in Geneva.

**Greengage** – This variety, originally called Reine-Claude, which dates back to the 1500s in France, was named Greengage after the Englishman Mr. Gage who imported it from France. It is partially self-fertile and well pollinated by Oullins Gage. The fruit has green skin that turns slightly yellow when tree ripe. Its flavor is considered outstanding by fresh plum connoisseurs. Brown rot can be a serious problem if multiple pickings are not made to keep ripe clusters open. The fruit ripens in Geneva around the end of August.

**Rosy Gage™** – (= NY 101 = NY 77.610.1) This Cornell-Geneva selection has just been released under this trademarked name. This green-yellow plum has exceptionally high sugar content and flavor. It ripens just after Oullins and has more pink/rosy colored blush in most seasons. The tree crops very heavily and retains high quality with large fruit loads. Fruits tend to be hidden in the foliage, which is abundant on this spreading, but vigorous tree. The tree is brown rot and black knot susceptible. We believe the fruit quality of this variety is worthy of grower cooperator trials to see how much of a limitation these susceptibilities are. It is self-incompatible and is readily pollinized by: Vanette, Reine Claude Conducta, Oullins, Polly, and Demontfort.

**Reine Claude Conducta** – This pink/purple skinned plum with high quality amber flesh is somewhat crisp and very sweet. It ripens with Early Italian and Castleton™ and sets lighter crops than the other gage-types listed above. This plum is so unusual in quality and color that every farmstand should have it. It is self-incompatible and requires a pollinizer. Recent French literature recommends as pollinizers: Stanley, Prune d’Ente 303, Monsieur Hatif, and Royale de Montauban (Audubert et al, 1995).

**Gras Romanesc** – (probable name). This plum was formerly called Herrenhausen Mirabelle by us in error. Maroon/purple skin with green/amber flesh that often exceeds 25% soluble solids when tree ripe. The fruit is round-oblong and average about one inch in diameter. Texture is somewhat crisp when eaten at best fresh market maturity level. It stores very well with sugar increasing in storage. Fruit ripen in mid-September in Geneva, and is self-incompatible. It is pollinized effectively by French Damson and Castleton™.

**Gras Ameliorat** – This may not be a Gage type by ancestry, but it seems to fall into this group by fruit character. It was bred in Romania by V. Cociu. The fruit are about 45 grams, round with a purple-red skin, over a golden ground color. The neck shrinks in dry seasons. The flesh is yellow, clings to the pit, and has a pleasing texture, with excellent flavor and a high sugar level. Pollination requirements are not clear, but it is not self-compatible. It ripens in the last half of September in Geneva. This variety is firm enough to store and ship to commercial markets.

### Mirabelles, Damsons & Bullaces

This category of plums includes varieties that are increasingly of interest on two marketing fronts: wine/brandy, and fresh snack-foods. While these two uses may seem unusually different to be utilizing the same varieties, the linking factor is very high sugar content with unique aroma (“nose” in wine/brandy terms).

**American Mirabelle** – This variety has golden skin with 20 percent pink blush. Fruit is very slightly necked. The tree crops very heavily and will become biennial. Primary uses are for jam and

wine/brandy. It ripens in early September in Geneva. It is self-incompatible and pollinized well by French Damson and Castleton™.

**French Damson** – This processing plum is used for its intense purple pigments and strong flavor that is too astringent for fresh market use. It is usually blended in processed products. Fruit is small and round with blue skin and green flesh. It ripens in mid September in Geneva. There are over a dozen other varieties of blue damson plums and another whole group of yellow and green skinned kinds that have generally been called “Bullace Plums” in European literature. All have the strong flavor. None are self-compatible. Other mirabelle varieties and other blue skinned plums from European ancestry will pollinate them.

**Jam Session™** (= NY 111 = NY 58.911.1) – This plum has small fruit, similar in size to Damson. In contrast to Damson it has no astringency. It has purple skin and yellow flesh, and is partially freestone. It tends to yield in a biennial pattern which we have not tried hard to overcome through management. It is self-fertile. In years with very heavy crops and wet weather near harvest time, it has not developed brown rot in the tightly clustered fruit. In some years we have seen significant levels of mite attack on the leaves (which can strain the tree to fully ripen a large crop). It usually ripens in the second week of September in Geneva. This fruit can be used to make a very nice dark purple jam with a good fruity character.

**Geneva Mirabelle™**(= NY 858) – This Cornell-Geneva selection has just been released under the trademarked name. It is similar to American Mirabelle except it is round and somewhat later in ripening. It is self-incompatible and pollinized well by French Damson and Castleton™.

**Blues Jam™** (= NY 9041 = NY 58.904.1) – This plum has fruit slightly larger than Damson. It has a moderate level of astringency, lower than Damson. The skin is purple-blue with greenish-yellow flesh. The pit is free. It is self-fertile. It is somewhat susceptible to mite attack on the leaves but it is much less inclined to be biennial than Jam Session™ (NY 111). It normally ripens in the last half of September in Geneva. It also

yields a very nice jam or sauce if you pay attention to managing the astringency.

**Mirabelle de Metz** – This variety is extensively used in Europe for production of high value brandy. We have not grown it recently at the Geneva Experiment Station.

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