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# **TREE CARE SHEET** *for* **SANTA ROSA PLUM** **(Semi-Dwarf)**

**SITE SELECTION** Choose a sunny site with well-drained soil that is protected from strong winds. If the location has too much shade, the tree will produce less and lower quality fruit. You want full sun for at least 6 hours a day in late spring, in summer and in early fall.

Give your plum tree plenty of space for roots as well as crown – 10 to 20 feet between trees is recommended. Good circulation around the tree helps prevent disease, and you'll need space to harvest and prune. Don't plant it in a lawn or with other plants that require frequent irrigation.

**WATER** How much water your tree needs depends on your soil, the temperature and wind, and the size of the tree, so you'll need to adjust as you go. Monitor the soil around the new tree and keep the root ball moist, but not wet. Avoid wetting the trunk. Depending on rain, your new tree may not need much irrigation until the weather is warm and new growth is several inches long.

In a moderate summer, your first-year tree is likely to need 5 to 10 gallons a week, applied every 1 to 3 weeks. As the tree grows, move the watering to the outer portion of the canopy. As the tree becomes mature, you'll also need to move to less frequent, deeper irrigation. To evaluate your irrigation, observe your tree (drooping or failure to thrive could mean water problems) and occasionally dig into the soil to see how far down you are wetting. Weeding and mulching around the tree will keep down the amount of water you need. Be sure to keep the mulch 4- 6 inches away from the trunk.

**FERTILIZING** Most Alameda soils are sandy and fast draining and nutrients leach out quickly, so you'll likely need to fertilize. But be careful not to over-fertilize as this will cause excessive new growth and can burn the roots. Avoid using fertilizer stakes, as they might burn roots, even to the point of killing an immature tree.

Young trees should be fertilized with a nitrogen fertilizer three times, in March, May and July. Mature trees should be fertilized with a fertilizer intended for fruit trees, according to the package directions. Apply the entire amount in the spring. Irrigate immediately after fertilizing, and if it is very dry, also irrigate a day before.

**PRUNING AND BRANCH THINNING** Plum trees need to be pruned to encourage fruiting, develop an appropriate shape and control excess growth. Generally, prune

when the leaves are off (when the tree is dormant). It's easier to see what you are doing and removal of dormant buds (growing points) invigorates the remaining buds. Santa Rosa plums are likely to also need summer pruning to control size and vegetative growth.

There are several approaches to pruning – these directions are for the open-center vase shape frequently used for apricot trees. Right after planting the bare root tree, cut it off to one short stick 24 to 30 inches high (1/4 inch above a bud or branch) and cut any other side shoots remaining below that. This encourages low branching and equalizes the top and root system.

If the tree is growing vigorously, in the late spring of the first growing season, select three or four shoots to become your primary scaffold. (If the tree isn't vigorous enough, delay this until August.) To the extent possible, these scaffold branches should be spaced evenly around the tree and each about 6 inches apart from the next vertically, with the lowest 12 to 18 inches above the ground. Look to keep branches at an angle of around 45 degrees to the trunk if possible. Don't choose branches directly vertically on top of one another. Pinch back all of the other shoots to about 4 to 6 inches. Young plum trees have vigorous upright growth, so you will need to prune its vigorous vertical shoots back to their outward-facing buds/branches and trim away branches that form narrow, V-shaped forks to avoid limb breakage. By the end of the fourth year, you'd like to end up with three to four primary scaffolds and five to seven secondary scaffold branches.

Other pruning tips:

- Summer pruning is likely to be needed to remove upright center growth to open up the tree and get sunlight into the center.
- Angle cuts at about 45 degrees away from the nearby bud or stem.
- If a branch isn't where you want it, you may be able to tie it down or spread it to get it into a better place rather than cutting it off.
- When pruning a mature plum tree, remove about 20% of the prior year's growth, starting with weak, diseased or dead limbs; any limbs pointing downward; watersprouts and any sprouting below the grafting junction.

**HARVESTING** A Santa Rosa plum tree starts producing fruit when it reaches 3 to 5 years of age. It produces early, and is likely to be ready to should ready to harvest in June or July. The plum fruits are ready to pick when their skin gives a bit when gently squeezed. Ripe plums pull easily away from the tree with a slight twist. Plums meant for cooking are picked when they are still slightly firm and can be allowed to continue ripening on a counter if some also are desired for eating raw. No need to avoid plums with white spots on their skins - these are caused by naturally occurring yeast and it does not affect the fruits.

**MAINTENANCE** Remove any mummified fruit hanging on the branches or on the ground to reduce future pest problems. Put it in the green bin, not your home compost.

**REFERENCES:** [www.ucanr.homeorchard.edu](http://www.ucanr.homeorchard.edu); The Home Orchard, Growing your Own Deciduous Fruit and Nut Trees, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Pub. 3485