

South Florida Tropicals: Carissa (Natal Plum)¹

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Background

The Carissa (Natal Plum) is a native of Southern Africa, where it is grown primarily for its edible berry-like fruits. Its botanical name is *Carissa grandiflora*. Carissa is planted extensively in the southern half of the United States as an ornamental shrub or hedge.

Availability

The plant blooms most profusely in early spring, but produces a few flowers throughout the year. The flowers bloom singly or in small terminal cymes at the end of the branches. Flowers are star-shaped, fragrant, white, and approximately 2 inches broad. The fruit matures in approximately 60 days, yielding most of its fruit in the summer. Carissa is not usually available in commercial markets. It is most often grown in South Florida.

Selection

The fruits of the carissa (*Carissa grandiflora*) are oval or round and vary in size and shape. A typical fruit is approximately an inch in diameter and one and a half inches long. The skin of the fully ripe fruit is bright crimson streaked with darker red; it is thin and bruises easily. The flesh is deep red or crimson with white mottling. In the center there are approximately twelve small brown flat seeds.

The fresh fruit has a mild, slightly pungent flavor, is slightly granular in texture, and is somewhat astringent. When bruised, broken, or cut, the fruit and branches exude a

1. This document is Fact Sheet FCS 8522, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension. Publication date: July 2004. First published as SS-HEC-12, May 1993. Revised August 2007. Reviewed November 2010 and November 2013. Please visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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white latex. This substance is harmless, except that it may be irritating if it comes in contact with the eye.

Uses

The carissa may be eaten fresh but it is more enjoyable when cooked. The cooked juice and pulp have an unpleasant milky-red appearance but become an attractive bright red when cooked with sugar. The jelly has a lovely red color with a delicate, characteristic flavor suggestive of raspberry. The sauce, made by straining or sieving the stewed fruit and cooking it with sugar, is preferred by some to cranberry jelly.

The white latex in the fruit forms a rubbery, sticky ring around the pan in which the carissa are cooked. To remove, rub with a piece of dry paper towel or with a coarse bit of cloth soaked with salad oil. Do not use steel wool or an abrasive powder as these make the sticky substance more difficult to remove. This fruit may be used canned or frozen; as jelly or preserves; in salads, sherbets, and sauces; or as a juice for punch.

Nutritive Value

The carissa has relatively large quantities of sugar and sufficient acid and pectin to make a good jelly. It is an excellent source of Vitamin C, containing somewhat more than the average orange. However, it is only a fair to poor source of all the other vitamins investigated. No analyses of the various minerals in carissa are available. One cup of raw carissa slices contains:

84% water
90 calories
0.8 gram protein
2 grams fat
20 grams carbohydrate
60 milligrams vitamin C

Source: USDA NDB Number: 09061

Food Safety During Preparation

- Following these steps will help reduce your risk of foodborne illness.
- Wash your hands with hot soapy water before and after:
- Handling fresh produce
- Handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
- Using the bathroom
- Changing diapers
- Handling pets
- Wash fresh carissa with cool tap water just before preparing or eating. **Don't use soap or detergents.**

- Cut away bruised or damaged areas before preparing or eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry, or seafood.

Table 1.

To Sanitize
• Mix one teaspoon of unscented chlorine bleach in one quart of water.
• Pour the mixture onto the surface and let sit at least one minute.
• Rinse well with hot running water.

- Don't cross contaminate. Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce. If you can, use a separate cutting board for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.
- Use a cooler with ice or gel packs when taking perishable food outdoors. This includes cut fresh fruits and vegetables.

To Freeze Carissas

- Wash, peel if desired, and cut in half lengthwise or leave whole.
- Pack into air-tight containers.
- Label and store at 0°F.

Using Carissas

Tropicals may vary in natural pectin, acid and sugar content from one season to another due to the variations of the climate.

Carissa Fruit Soup*

1¾ cups apple juice or cider
¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons cornstarch
4 inch stick cinnamon, broken
4 whole cloves

Stir the above ingredients in a saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until boiling. Reduce heat and cook until clear, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and add:

¾ cup orange sections
¾ cup grapefruit sections
½ cup seedless grapes
1 cup seeded, halved carissas

Cover and chill overnight. Remove spices and stir well before serving cold. Makes 6 servings.

Carissa Pie*

1 pint carissas (sliced crosswise)
1 tablespoon flour
1 tablespoon margarine
½ cup sugar
½ cup water
pastry

Slice well-ripened carissas into a deep, buttered, baking dish. Mix flour with sugar and sprinkle over the fruit. Dot lightly with margarine. Pour water over the mixture. Top with pastry, slit to allow steam to escape and bake at 450° for ten minutes, then at 425° for 20 minutes until fruit is cooked and pastry is brown. Serve hot with Carissa Sauce flavored with lemon juice or with vanilla.

Carissa Sauce*

Rinse fruit, cut in quarters. Take out seeds retaining pulp. Measure ½ cup sugar or sugar substitute to each cup cut carissas. Over low heat, cook carissas and sugar (no water added) until fruit is soft. Use as a sauce similar to cranberry sauce. For jellied sauce, add 2 tablespoons of water for each cup carissa. Cook until fruit is tender. Strain juice through jelly bag or a double layer of cheesecloth. Add to ½ cup sugar for each ¾ cup juice. Cook until thickened.

Carissa Bread**

2 cups flour
1½ teaspoon baking powder
1 cup sugar
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 egg, well beaten
½ cup orange juice
2 tablespoons shortening, melted
2 tablespoons hot water
1½ cups carissa, seeded and chopped
1 orange rind, grated
½ cup chopped nuts

Sift together flour, baking powder, sugar, salt, and soda. Add egg, orange juice, shortening, and hot water. Stir only until flour is moistened. Fold in carissa, orange rind and nuts. Bake at 350° in greased and floured loaf pan for 45 minutes. Yield: 20 servings.

Carissa Hors D'oeuvres

Wash and drain fresh, ripe fruit. Split, remove seeds, and put on ice until shortly before serving. Stuff cavities with low-fat cottage cheese or light cream cheese. Place on a bed of shredded lettuce.

Jellied Carissa Salad*

1 tablespoon unflavored gelatin
½ cup cold water
1½ cups boiling carissa juice or juice and pulp
½ cup sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1½ cups chopped celery

Sprinkle gelatin on cold water and let stand 5 minutes. Dissolve sugar, salt, and softened gelatin in boiling carissa juice. Allow to cool and add lemon juice. When mixture begins to thicken, add chopped celery. Turn into a mold and chill. When firm, turn the mold onto a bed of shredded lettuce and garnish with light mayonnaise, if desired.

Carissa Salad*

1 pound carissas
1 cup water
1 cup sugar
4 teaspoons gelatin
½ cup cold water
½ cup chopped celery
½ cup diced apples
½ cup pecans

Cook carissas in 1 cup water until tender, strain and add sugar. Moisten gelatin in cold water. Add to sugar and carissas. Stir until dissolved, then add celery, apples and nuts. Chill in the refrigerator and serve on lettuce.

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