

Carissa grandiflora Natal Plum, Common Carissa¹

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Introduction

Carissa is one of Florida's and California's very best seaside shrubs (Fig. 1). This moderately fast-growing, evergreen shrub has lustrous, leathery, rich green, oval leaves and spines along its branches. It is hard to find a plant with darker green leaves. Flowers are somewhat fragrant, white, and star-shaped. The bright red, edible, plum-shaped fruit tastes like cranberries and can be used to make jam. Flowers and fruit are quite showy and are often borne on the plant simultaneously.

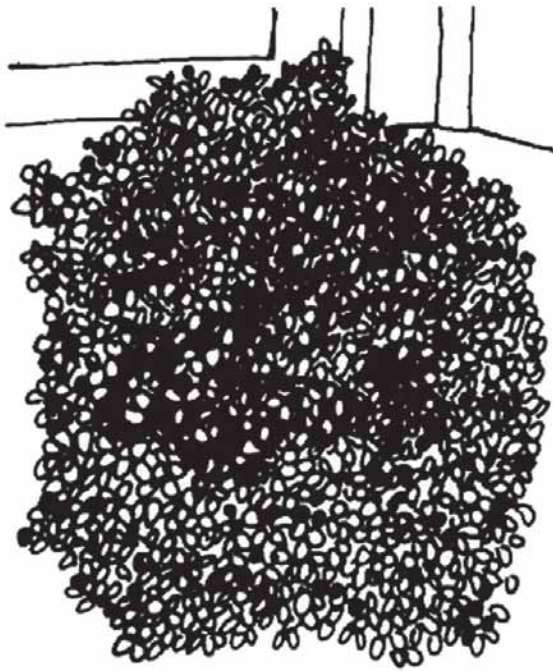


Figure 1. Natal plum.

General Information

Scientific name: *Carissa grandiflora*

Pronunciation: kuh-RISS-uh gran-dif-FLOR-uh

Common name(s): natal plum, common carissa

Family: *Apocynaceae*

Plant type: ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: bonsai; foundation; screen; border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; fruit; espalier; ground cover; superior hedge; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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Description

Height: 6 to 10 feet
Spread: 4 to 10 feet
Plant habit: spreading; upright
Plant density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: terminal spine
Leaf shape: ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; pleasant fragrance

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption; persists on the plant

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; acidic; alkaline; loam
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: good
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Natal plum will tolerate a variety of soils and exposures and only needs light pruning. Useful as a screen or hedge, it should not be planted too closely to walkways where its large, forked thorns can injure passersby. It makes a nice, full foundation shrub. While it thrives in full sun, natal plum can adapt to fairly heavy shade and requires only moderate watering and fertilization. Plant on three to six-foot centers for a hedge or mass planting, closer for the compact cultivars. Dwarf cultivars such as 'Green Carpet', 'Horizontalis', and 'Prostrata' make excellent groundcovers.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

Natal plum is relatively pest-free.

Natal plum is susceptible to root rot when plants are overwatered.