

# Carissa grandiflora Natal Plum, Common Carissa<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Carissa is one of Florida's and California's very best seaside shrubs. 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. Full Form—*Carissa grandiflora*: Natal Plum, Common Carissa Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf—*Carissa grandiflora*: Natal Plum, Common Carissa Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Flower—*Carissa grandiflora*: Natal Plum, Common Carissa Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

- 1. This document is FPS107, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised March 2023. Visit the EDIS website at https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication.
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Figure 4. Fruit—Carissa grandiflora: Natal Plum, Common Carissa Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

# **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 (Figure 5)

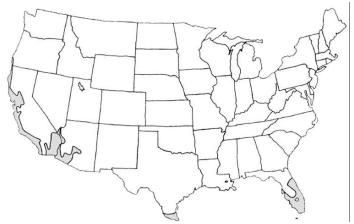


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting range. Credits: undefined

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**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

# **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

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.