

Carissa grandiflora Natal Plum, Common Carissa¹

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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
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Figure 2. Leaf—*Carissa grandiflora*: Natal Plum, Common Carissa
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Figure 3. Flower—*Carissa grandiflora*: Natal Plum, Common Carissa
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Figure 4. Fruit—*Carissa grandiflora*: Natal Plum, Common Carissa
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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.