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.

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

Figure 1. Natal-Plum.

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)
Carissa grandiflora Natal Plum, Common Carissa

**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**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

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**Trunk and Branches**

*Trunk/bark/branches:* not particularly showy; typically multitrunked 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.