



Natal Plum Care Sheet



S & S Bonsai
Steven Alford

1024 Bonfoy Ave.
Colorado Springs CO 80909

Bus: 719-633-9110 cell: 719-332-0546
fax: 719-633-9110 support@bonsaitoolchest.com
www.bonsaitoolchest.com

Brought to you by
S & S Bonsai of Colorado Springs, Colorado
(Most of the included information is obtained from several
online sources.)

*"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if
you were to live forever."*
—*Mahatma Gandhi*—

The Natal Plum

(*Carissa macrocarpa* *Synonym*

Carissa grandiflora)

General Information: The Natal plum is a semi-tropical evergreen plant bearing fragrant, star-shaped white flowers and, following pollination, dark red edible plum-shaped fruits. It is Native to Northern South African province of KwaZulu/Natal.

A very popular bonsai tree because of its beautiful fragrant white flowers and tasty red fruits. It is an evergreen vine-like shrub with glossy dark green foliage. Leaves are oval and arranged in opposing pairs. Branches are dense covered with forked spines. Wounded branches generate white milky sap. It produces fragrant star-shaped white flowers with five thick and waxy petals.

The great thing about Natal Plum is that it booms almost all year long. In the summer and fall flowers are followed by pretty egg-shaped red fruits, that are edible. When the fruit is fully ripened, it turns to dark-red and is slightly soft to the touch. It can be eaten raw.

Natal plum is a strong plant which tolerates almost any abuse. It can be grown under almost any conditions (except freezing cold), but when grown under optimum conditions of high heat and humidity, growth is extremely rapid and the rooting of cuttings an almost sure success.

CARE

Temperature: It is a subtropical to near-tropical plant that grows best in the USDA Zones 9b-10. It needs to be protected from cold temperatures below 40°F. The ideal climate will have hot summer days with cool nights. Prefers night temperatures between 50-65°F and day temperatures of 68°F or higher. In temperatures up to 70°F, growth will be tight with short internodal spaces, in higher temperatures, new growth will be leggy and thin. Put Natal Plum outside in the Summer and bring indoors when temperatures drop to 50°F. If it gets too cold, Natal Plum may drop its leaves.

Lighting: To get maximum blooms it should be exposed to full sun, at least four hours of direct sunlight daily. It can also grow in partial shade. If growing indoors, keep it in a southern or western window or supplement with grow-lights.

Watering: Water frequently but let the soil dry slightly between waterings to avoid root rot. Avoid water-logging by providing it with good drainage. This plant is drought tolerant.

Fertilizing: Apply a balanced fertilizer at half strength weekly. It needs high phosphorus fertilizer to promote flowering and applications of iron twice during the growing season to prevent chlorosis. A dose of micronutrients at the end of December and in April is needed.

Pruning / Training: Do major pruning in mid to late spring, after flowering. Do not prune all the green foliage off a branch, as this will cause the branch to die back. Otherwise, buds back with vigor. Continue to prune as necessary during growth. *Carissa* grows rapidly, especially in hot climates, so pruning may be frequent. Trimming of new shoots (those with 3-4 pairs of leaves) to one or two pairs of leaves throughout spring and summer is needed. Watch out for shorter rounded shoots. These are flowering shoots. Since natal plums produce flowers on new growth, allow some branches to grow out unpruned. After flowering, these branches may

be pruned back or, if fruit is desired, allowed to remain until after the fruit declines. Wire only the trunk and woody branches, and the use of raffia protection before wiring on young plants is suggested. It can be wired at any time except while flowering. Older branches can be brittle, so use caution when wiring. Check wiring often, due to the rapid growth of the plant. Take care to remove pollinated blossoms as too many fruit can overtax the strength of this plant in a bonsai pot.

Insects / Pests: Prone to fungal infestation. Mealy bugs, Spider mites, aphids, thrips and whiteflies, and occasionally scale insects. On the whole, a very strong plant.

Propagation: By seeds, cuttings, air-layering, and grafting. Roots readily from cuttings, especially woody ones. Bottom heat and rooting hormone is recommended for cuttings. Will root when placed in a glass of water.

Repotting: In fast growing young plants, yearly repotting with root pruning is needed. In established plants, repotting should be done every two years.

Some recommend repotting in fall or winter only, while others recommend repotting in mid-spring to midsummer. The important thing to do is repot when the night time temperatures are in the 60'sF. Keep root pruning to a minimum. Limit water until the plant is firmly established to reduce risk of root rot. Use a basic bonsai mix that gives good drainage. Natal Plum prefers a sandy alkaline soil 50 % potting mix, 25% Turface and 25% course sand or small pumice.

Design and Styling: These trees make good informal uprights or cascades.

Some of the popular ornamental cultivars include: 'Dainty Princess', 'Low Boy', 'Grandiflora', 'Green Carpet', 'Prostrata', 'Horizontalis', 'Linkii', 'Minima', 'Nana', 'Boxwood Beauty', 'Nana Compacta', and 'Tuttle'.