

## Nia Care Sheet

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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 Nia

(*Neea buxifolia*)

**General Information:** Nia, also known as salt-wood, is a fine-leaved, upright, stiff, twiggy, yet manageable evergreen shrub. There is usually a single stem emerging from the ground with multiple branches low on the stem. Nia plants have a weak taproot with lateral and fine roots, all brownish orange in color. The few slender branches form a diffuse crown. Nia is native to Puerto Rico, its offshore island of Culebra, St. Thomas and St. John of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Virgin Gorda of the British Virgin Islands.

**Bark Characteristics:** Bark is smooth and gray. The inner bark is bitter. The wood is whitish, soft, and does not have discernable annual rings.

**Leaf/Foliage Characteristics:** Oblong to oblanceolate, entire leaves are opposite or in whorl-like groups along the twigs. The leaves are about 1/4 inch long, narrow, and oblong with a rounded apex. The petioles are short and the twigs grow laterally.

**Growth Characteristics:** Nia is relatively slow growing. Open-grown ornamentals reached 6 feet in height in about 8 years. Understory saplings add just a few inches of height per year. Life span in forests may reach several decades. Nia grows somewhat like *Ilex vomitoria* in that the new branches grow in all directions. The effect can be dense and undisciplined. While this pattern may be a challenge at first, with attention the close growth of the twigs creates a compact outline desirable in bonsai.

**Flower/Fruit Characteristics:** Small light yellow flowers are borne on separate plants (dioecious). The elliptic, red, slightly fleshy fruits are 1/4 inch long and contain one seed each. Nia flowers in the spring and early summer and fruits matures in mid to late summer. The fruits, which are produced in

sparing quantities, ripen a few at a time over a period of a few weeks.

### CARE

**Temperature:** Minimum temperature at which the plant will survive is 40°F degrees.

**Lighting:** Filtered sun. The Nia appreciates lots of sunlight, however during intense summers in southern areas the Nia should be given some protection.

**Watering:** Water adequately, keep the tree from drying out. Use a well draining soil and keep the soil moist but not soggy, the Nia won't tolerate wet feet.

**Fertilizing:** Regular feeding with a balanced fertilizer, as often as twice a month during the growing season. The Nia is NOT a heavy feeder.

**Pruning / Training:** Nia make great shohin bonsai due to the small leaves. Branches grow straight up from the trunk reaching for the sun. Cut off unnecessary new growth and tie down new growth to avoid arching branches off the trunk. Nia may be branch pruned throughout the year in tropical locations. Since the branches and twigs elongate so rapidly, frequent pinching and trimming are necessary. Clip and grow is the recommended training method. Wiring is also difficult due to profuse, erratic branch growth. Wire when the branches are young and still soft, older wood becomes more brittle.

**Insects / Pests:** No major issues are noted besides the average garden pests, watch for signs of mealy bugs, aphids and scale.

**Propagation:** Branch cuttings between March and June, air layers, and seed propagation. Seed propagation is especially useful for shohin rock plantings.

**Repotting:** Young trees can be repotted every year and may be severely root pruned but it is recommended not to root prune until necessary as the Nia prefers to be slightly root bound as this en-

hances flowering. Older more well established trees can go three years before repotting. Repot in the summer when night time temperatures are over 60°F. The soil should be well draining.

**Design and Styling:** Nia's are easily styled as Brooms and Umbrellas. Nia may be styled in any way consistent with the growth pattern of the particular tree, although formal upright would be difficult to manage.