

*Carissa macrocarpa* (Eckl.) A.DC.

Family: Apocynaceae

Common Name: Big Num-num/Amantungulu (English); Grootnoemnoem (Afrikaans); umThungulu (isiXhosa/isiZulu)

SA Tree Number: 640.3

**Description:** A shrub or small tree that grows up to 4 m in height.

The spines are neatly twice forked and large.

The leaves are thick, fairly large, shiny and leathery.

Flowers are solitary or borne in clusters, quite large and sweetly scented, and may be borne in showy profusion or one at a time. Flowering can occur year-round.

Fruit is large, red when ripe containing latex in the skin and very edible indeed, with a tart, sweet flavour.

**Distribution:** It occurs in coastal bush, on sand dunes and at the margins of coastal forest, from the vicinity of Humansdorp northwards through KwaZulu-Natal and just into Mozambique.

**Name derivation:** *Carissa* is probably derived from "Corissa", a local name for one of the Indian species. *Macrocarpa* refers to the unusually large size of the fruit.

The "num-num" appellation is an onomatopoeic word referring to the delicious fruit borne by this species.

**Ecology and uses:** Plants produce attractive flowers that attract birds and insects.

The fruit (a berry) of all *Carissa* species is edible and is rich in Vitamin C, calcium, magnesium and phosphorus.

The fruit of *C. macrocarpa* is, as has been mentioned, especially large and delicious and is used to make jelly. They are eagerly consumed by birds, which also distribute the seed.

**Cultivation:** Easily cultivated from fresh seed and cuttings treated with a suitable hormone preparation.

*Carissa* species are valued as garden plants because of their flowers, which are white, or nearly so, scented and borne in profusion. Young plants can be frost tender.

Many cultivars of the species exist; "Green Carpet" is a prostrate type that is commonly used as a groundcover in the landscaping industry. Care must be taken to prune off branches that show signs of "reverting" back to the large, shrub/tree form of the species to preserve the character of this type.

Cultivars of the species exist overseas bred ("improved") for reliable fruit production. These are unknown in South Africa.

The plant is fairly hardy to frost and large specimens often show little to no damage even in the coldest Gauteng winter.

The species is a staple in the domestic landscaping industry and can be seen planted especially in commercial landscapes.

**Notes:** All the *Carissa* species are spiny, evergreen shrubs containing latex. The forked spines serve as an easy to recognise characteristic of the genus.

Unlike many other members of the family, the latex in *Carissa* is non-toxic and harmless.

This species is a common garden plant in warm areas, where it grows moderately quickly.

Plants are very wind and salt spray resistant and have a non-invasive root system.

Recommended for security hedges in suitable climates.

Found in **Section B** of the **Map**

**References:**

Coates Palgrave, K. & Coates Palgrave, M. 2002. *Keith Coates Palgrave trees of southern Africa* edn 3. Struik, Cape Town.

Joffe, P. 2001. *Creative gardening with indigenous plants - a South African guide*. Briza Publications, Pretoria.

Van Wyk, B. & Van Wyk, P. 1997. *Field guide to the trees of southern Africa*. Struik, Cape Town.

Van Wyk, B., van den Berg, E., Coates Palgrave, M. & Jordaan, M. 2011. *Dictionary of names for southern African trees*. Briza Publications, Pretoria.

Venter, F. and Venter, J. 1996. *Making the most of indigenous trees*. Briza Publications, Pretoria.

**Web Resources:**

South African National Biodiversity Institute website, "Plants of South Africa".  
<http://www.plantzafrica.com/frames/plantsfram.htm>. Site accessed 01/02/2012.