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Carissa macrocarpa

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Carissa macrocarpa (Eckl.) A.DC.

Family: Apocynaceae

Common names: Natal plum, big num-num (Eng.); grootnoem-noem (Afr.); Amatungulu (Zulu)

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The Natal plum is a common and often conspicuous species in coastal bush and sand dunes.



Description

The amatungulu is a fast-growing, ornamental shrub that is wind resistant and can grow in coastal areas. It usually forms a dense thorny shrub but it can grow into a small tree up to 4 m high. This species has Y-shaped thorns; the young branches are green and all parts of the plant exude a white, milky, non-toxic latex.



Leaves are leathery, a shiny dark green above and paler below, 20-60 x 15-35 mm, egg-shaped, oval or almost round. The tips of the leaves are sharply or bluntly pointed and usually with a mucro, a thorn-like point. The flowers vary in size, up to 35 mm in diameter, are pure white and scented like orange blossom. The flower tube is hairy within. The large, oval fruit is edible and is rich in Vitamin C, magnesium and phosphorus. It flowers from spring to midsummer. A low-growing form of *C. macrocarpa*, Green carpet, is a popular groundcover plant which seldom grows more than knee-height.

Distribution and habitat

It grows in coastal bush, coastal forests and on sand dunes, from Humansdorp in the Eastern Cape northwards through Kwazulu-Natal to Mozambique.

Derivation of name and historical aspects

The name *Carissa* is derived from the Sanskrit *corissa*, the name of one of the Indian species. The specific name *macrocarpa* is derived from Greek *macro*= large and *carpus*=fruit. The common name amatungulu is the Zulu name *amaTungula* meaning 'fruit of the umThungula' (Palmer & Pitman 1972).

Uses

The shrub makes a good garden hedge and the fruits can be eaten raw or made into delicious jams or jellies. This ornamental shrub attracts birds and butterflies to the garden.



Growing Carissa macrocarpa

Plant 1 m apart to form a dense, impenetrable hedge in full sun to semi-shade in good garden soil, enriched with compost. It can be pruned if necessary. It is best grown from seed, but can also be grown from cuttings. Fill the seed tray with compost and compact lightly. Treat seed with a pre-emergence fungicide and sow in the tray, cover the seed with a thin layer of compost and water well. Store tray in a wind-free area. Once germinated, replant seedlings into well-composted soil. Seedlings can be fed with a liquid fertilizer.

Coming from coastal areas, this plant is frost tender, but can survive a little frost if planted in a protected spot.

References

- Joffe, P. 1993. The gardener's guide to South African plants. Tafelberg, Cape Town.
- Palmer, E. & Pitman, N. 1972. Trees of southern Africa. Balkema, Cape Town.
- Venter, F. & Venter, J-A. 1994. Making the most of indigenous trees: the large num-num. Farmers Weekly 29 July 1994: 60, 61. Berenice Carolus Harold Porter NBG March 2004 With additions by Yvonne Reynolds

Berenice Carolus

Harold Porter NBG

March 2004

With additions by Yvonne Reynolds

Plant Attributes:

Plant Type: Shrub

SA Distribution: Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape

Soil type: Sandy

Flowering season: Spring, Early Summer

PH: Acid

Flower colour: White

Aspect: Full Sun, Morning Sun (Semi Shade)

Gardening skill: Average

Special Features:

 Attracts birds

 Attracts butterflies

 Fragrant



Hedge/screen



Edible plant



Feeds honeybees

Horticultural zones



Zone 1 Coastal summer rainfall, frost free

Zone 2 Coastal winter rainfall, frost free

Zone 5 Bushveld summer rainfall, Light frost

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