

Natal Plum Care from BonsaiOutlet.com

General Background:

Natal plum is a strong and moderately fast growing plant which tolerates almost any abuse. This showy plant is native to South Africa and can be grown under almost any conditions (except freezing cold). When grown under optimum conditions of high heat and humidity, growth is extremely rapid and the rooting of cuttings an almost sure success. Natal plum is a perfect Bonsai for beginners and is sure to delight with its beauty and simplicity.

Trees Features:

The Natal plum features some of the richest green leaves you can find on a plant. It's closely set oval leaves and spines grow along the branches. Beautiful showy flowers are fragrant, white and star shaped, and blooms can be seen anytime of the year followed by 2 inch fruits that look like dark red plums. Flowers and fruit are often seen simultaneously on this Bonsai making it quite a show-piece.

Temperature:

The Natal plum prefers night temperatures between 50-65 degrees and day temperatures of 68 degrees or higher. As it needs warmth in the winter season, it can successfully be grown indoors, but it will require the use of a nearby fan to reduce the likelihood of fungal infestations.

Lighting:

This Bonsai does best in at least 4 hours of direct sunlight a day but can easily adapt to fairly heavy shade conditions.

Watering:

The Natal plum requires moderate watering conditions. Be sure not to overwater because it is susceptible to root rot. When grown indoors, use of a moisture tray to maintain humidity is recommended, keeping the pot elevated on pebbles to ensure that the roots do not sit in water at any time. This plant has a high drought tolerance, making it a perfect specimen for the frequent traveler or any individual with a tendency to forget regular watering.

Fertilizing:

Because the Natal plum likes a slightly acidic environment, you will want to feed with an acid fertilizer like Miracid every two weeks during growth, Reduce feeding to once a month during the winter season.

Pruning / Training:

You can trim your Natal plum Bonsai anytime of the year. 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, you will find that it tends to bud back with vigor. Continue to prune as necessary during growth. Natal plum grows rapidly, especially in hot climates, so pruning may be frequent giving the beginning Bonsai enthusiast plenty of opportunities to practice their craft. These trees make good informal uprights or cascades. Older branches can be brittle, so use caution when wiring. Check and adjust wiring often, due to the rapid growth of the plant.

Insects / Pests:

On the whole, The Natal Plum is a very strong and disease resistant plant, though it can be Prone to fungal infestation if over watered. Spider mites and scale are occasional problems that are easily dealt with using an effective remedy of a diluted soap and water solution. Spray the leaves until the solution runs off, gently wipe leaves with a soft sponge, rinsing after each pass to ensure insect removal. Take a final rinse with pure water and keep your eyes peeled in the days following for further attacks!

Propagation:

This Bonsai is best propagated by stem cuttings taken anytime of the year. Stem cuttings should be 4 to 6 inches long, treated with rooting hormone and inserted in moist sand with bottom heat. Roots readily from cuttings, especially lignified ones. It will also easily root when placed in a glass of water. Once a root system has been established, plant in suitable compost for Natal plum consisting of 2 parts loam to 1 part peat moss to 1 part sand. Be sure to keep moist-not wet.

Repotting:

Transplant in fall or winter and be sure to keep root pruning to a minimum. Use fast draining soil. Limit water until the plant is firmly established to reduce risk of root rot.

Additional Comments:

The lovely fruit of the Natal plum tastes remarkably like cranberries and can be used to make jam.

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