

Neea Buxifolia - Neea buxifolia

General Information: Neea buxifolia is a stiff, twiggy, yet manageable and versatile shrub native to Puerto Rico. Commonly spelled "Nia," the botanical name is "Neea." It is a member of the Nyctaginaceae family, which includes the Bougainvillea, and grows to fifteen feet with a trunk circumference of five to six inches. The leaves are about one quarter inch long, narrow, and oblong with a rounded apex. The petioles are short and the twigs grow laterally. The tree is especially attractive during the growing season due to the deep red color of its new shoots. The bark is gray and smooth. Neea bears small flowers in spring and summer followed by little, red mature fruit in summer.

Neea 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.

Lighting: Neea should be grown in filtered sun.

Temperature: Minimum temperature at which the plant will survive is 40 F degrees. (Per Jim Smith in Vero Beach, FL.)

Watering: Adequate water to keep it from drying out.

Feeding: Trees should be fertilized twice a month and trace elements, especially iron and calcium, given twice a year.

Pruning and wiring: The tree has no particular natural form, unlike Juniperus procumbens, which almost dictates a semi cascade or cascade style. Therefore, the Neea may be styled in any way consistent with the growth pattern of the particular tree, although formal upright would be difficult to manage. Neea may be branch pruned throughout the year in tropical locations. Since the branches and twigs elongate so rapidly, frequent pinching and trimming are necessary. Wiring is also difficult due to profuse, erratic branch growth. Broom and umbrella styles are easy and shohin is a good choice.

Propagation: Neea may be propagated by branch cuttings from March through June, by seed, or by air layering. Seed propagation is especially useful for shohin rock plantings.

Repotting: While young, the tree needs annual repotting and may be severely root pruned. Older trees should be repotted every three to five years. In tropical locations repotting may be done any time of the year. The soil should be well draining.

Pests and diseases: No information available.

Bibliography:

Montalvo, Adan. "Neea Buxifolia: A Puerto Rican Bonsai Treasure" in the World Tropical Bonsai Forum, Winter 1991: 17-20.

Reprinted as "Neea Buxifolia" in Florida Bonsai, Vol 25, No. 1, pg 25-26.

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