

Ruschia lineolata 'Nana' Installation and Care Guidelines

Introduction

Ruschia lineolata 'Nana' (PPAF) is a selection of Ruschia lineolata, a low growing, evergreen perennial from South Africa. Ruschia 'Nana' has smaller leaves and a more dwarf growth habit than the native species. This heat loving plant is extremely drought tolerant and fire resistant. Growth habit is from 1-2" tall. Ruschia 'Nana' tolerates a wide range of soil types, provides strong weed suppression, and has very minimal maintenance requirements.

Ruschia 'Nana' is planted from plugs. It may be planted on a square or triangular pattern, and once roots are established, it will begin to fill in from stolons (runners) that move along the soil surface and "knit together", providing for a green, carpet-like appearance that makes it very difficult for weeds to get established. This dense coverage does not inhibit growth of other upright herbaceous or woody plants in the landscape. Small white flowers with pink stripes appear from January through April, followed by a shorter flowering season in fall. Ruschia 'Nana' has decent cold tolerance, and excellent heat tolerance, ranging from 20F to 120F.

When and Where to Plant

Ruschia 'Nana' may be planted year around. Optimal fill in will occur during the growing seasons between March and October. Fill in will be most rapid between April (after frost) and September. Ruschia Nana is adapted to USDA climate zones of 9a and higher. Foliage remains green year around in these USDA zones.

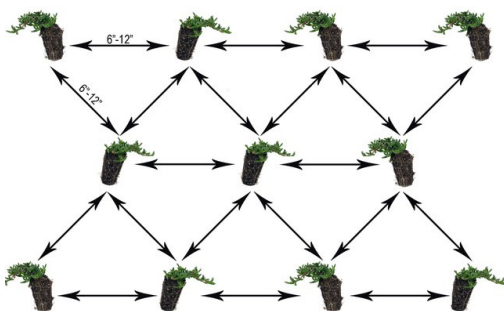
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Plant in areas of full sun, down to half shade locations where at least 5-6 hours of sunlight are available.

Time Required to Establish

When planted on 6" centers during the growing season, Ruschia 'Nana' will fill in within 3 to 5 months given proper attention to soil preparation, irrigation and fertilization. Planting plugs on optional 12" centers is budget-friendly, but the planted area will fill in more slowly, taking from 5-7 months on average. Late fall, winter and early spring plantings will require a bit more growing time. A minimum of 5-6 hours of direct sunlight is required to perform well, or the equivalent in filtered light.

Determining How Many Plugs



To calculate the number of plugs required for a designated area, take the planting area in square feet and multiply times the conversion factor of 4.0 for for spacing 6" on center, then divide by 72 (the number of plugs in a tray). For example, for 328 sf, multiply that area x 4.0: 328sf x 4.0 = 1,312 plugs / 72 = 18 trays.

For efficiency purposes, we do not split plug trays, so if your area of coverage falls between full tray counts, you may choose to round up or down, either closing in the spacing or stretching it out.

Site Preparation

While Ruschia 'Nana' will tolerate a range of soil types, it will establish faster in soils with good physical properties. For extremely sandy soils, add organic matter to improve soil texture and water-holding capacity. For heavy clay soils, loosen top 4" of soil and add a couple inches of organic matter to improve adequate aeration and drainage. Taking a bit extra time for preparation is well worth it, and will enhance fill-in time!

Prior to planting, all weeds should be removed by hand or killed with a non-selective herbicide. RoundUp (glyphosphate) is one such chemical; follow label instructions. For planting sites that have been neglected and may also have a large population of weed seeds in the soil, use of a pre-emergent herbicide can help reduce weed seedlings that will come naturally when such areas receive irrigation. Pre-emergent treatments are best done a couple months before planting.

If Ruschia 'Nana' is being used as a lawn replacement and invasive grasses such as Bermuda or Kikuyu are present, but sure to consult with your local garden center or a good internet reference as to how to properly get rid of these invasive grasses, which can spread below ground, above ground, and by seed. Don't know if you have Bermuda or Kikuyu? Again, you may consult with your local garden center or a good online reference.

NOTE: Do not rush the site preparation; there is little benefit in getting the plugs planted only to see vast weed problems come up a couple of weeks later. Taking the time and proper steps to get rid of weeds and weed seeds will be well worth the effort!

Receipt of Plugs

Immediately open boxes upon arrival. Place plugs in an open area in partial to full sun, preferably protected from wind. Avoid delaying plug planting by more than one week. Plug trays will need to be kept adequately watered during any holding period; this may be once or more a day in very hot weather if plugs are in full sun.

Planting

Make sure that plugs are well-watered before planting, either by hand watering well or by a brief soaking of the plug trays in a sink or large container.

IMPORTANT: Determine the proper soil level. Ruschia 'Nana' will finish at a height of 2". So, if planting it next to a patio, sidewalk, driveway, etc. you will want the soil level to be 2" lower than the adjacent surface (so that the Ruschia 'Nana' area does not rise 2" above the patio, sidewalk, driveway, etc.

Dig a hole that is twice the diameter of the plug, and about twice as deep. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT; make sure that the plug soil is surrounded by landscape soil or the plug will dry out quickly, reducing chances of survival. Equally important, be sure to place the plug in the bottom of the hole: do not leaving an air pocket below the plugs this can lead to plugs drying out severely.

Place plug in hole and lightly pack loose soil around the plug, exposing foliage above soil level. NO MULCHING IS REQUIRED when planting.

NOTE: Rabbits may damage new Ruschia 'Nana' plantings in winter months, particularly when there is little other vegetation present. The damage does not kill the plugs but may set back the fill in time substantially, due to loss of growth. Where rabbit populations are a concern and particularly in winter months, we suggest providing a temporary low fencing around the planting area; by late February/early March the rabbits will be more interested in softer textured vegetation and will leave the Ruschia 'Nana' alone.

Irrigation

Water Ruschia 'Nana' plugs lightly and frequently to keep them moist, without washing away the soil around the plugs. In the first 3 to 4 weeks, the Ruschia plugs will only benefit from the water that hits them directly overhead. Shortly thereafter, the plug roots will have entered the garden soil and will be able to draw moisture from it. If uncertain that plugs are getting ample moisture, dig down alongside some of them to determine whether they are being thoroughly wetted.

If using drip irrigation, it is generally a good idea to hand water the plugs in well for the first irrigation; for subsequent irrigations with drip lines, make certain that water is dispersing through the soil enough to wet the entire plugs. Provide supplemental overhead water if needed in these first weeks.

As with many drought tolerant plants, Ruschia Nana has a very low water requirement, once established. Do not let plugs go unnecessarily dry during the key establishment period.

Subsequent 2-3 Months

About 4 weeks from planting, the irrigation regime should be switched from small amounts of water every other day to a more thorough, deeper watering two to three times a week depending on location and weather. Additional irrigation may become necessary in extremely hot or windy conditions until plants are established. If uncertain about soil moisture levels, there is no substitute for getting out there and digging down into your soil for a look.

Long Term Irrigation Strategy

Once fully established, Ruschia 'Nana' will perform very well with just one deep irrigation a week during spring and summer and less in fall, winter, and early spring, and often even less after the first year of establishment. There is no one irrigation recommendation for Ruschia 'Nana'; water needs will vary by local climate, soil type, time of year, type of irrigation system and irrigation methods. Most established Ruschia plantings will require a minimum of one irrigation once every 8-10 days to hold green color. In general, if plant foliage is yellowing, too much water is being applied; if foliage turns very light green in color or gray-green, or tips of foliage are turning copper or brown, plants are being allowed to go too dry.

NOTE: Ruschia 'Nana', along with any other plants in the landscape, will often look as good (or as bad) as the irrigation system that is used to deliver water to it. You have invested in a very low water plant, but should not needlessly waste water with an automatic irrigation system that needs to run longer due to poor design, poor water distribution, clogged nozzles, leaks, or an inability to reprogram the irrigation clock!

Fertilization

Unless the planting area has been amended with a pre-plant fertilizer, it is important to provide fertilization once new shoot growth is evident, within about 3-4 weeks from planting. Feeding at this time will expedite growth and coverage. Apply a complete N-P-K fertilizer (15-15-15) at a rate of ½ lb. of N per 1,000 sf.

If practical early on, applying fertilizer to the plug areas only will save on fertilizer, minimize nutrient run off, and prevent fertilization of any weeds that may occur between plugs in this early stage. Alternatively, a liquid feed such as Miracle Gro or a host of similar products can be applied once during the first month from planting at label rate.

Once the Ruschia 'Nana' planting is fully established, fertilization needs are greatly reduced, and typically will be required only once a year in spring (for growth and flowering) using a balanced, 15-15-15 fertilizer at a rate of ½ lb. of N per 1000 sf. If desired, a one-time fall fertilization can also be applied to help maintain green foliage color going into cooler weather.

Weed Control

For planting areas that have been well-managed, weed control may be done by hand removal or with a hoe or cultivator. Planting area should be walked once a week during Ruschia 'Nana' establishment period (it is okay to walk on the plugs at this stage!), taking care to remove weeds when small, and NOT ALLOW them to go to flower, which is quickly followed by seed, creating more weeds several weeks later.

Pests & Diseases

There are no known pests or diseases that will affect Ruschia 'Nana' in the relatively hot and dry California climate. Excessive over-irrigation or standing water will set the plants back some. Yellowing foliage is most often a sign of overwatering. Foliage that is lighter in color, or turning a bronze color on the tips of the foliage is usually a sign of an excessively dry planting, or one that may be in need of fertilization.

Trimming/ Mowing

Ruschia 'Nana' has a low growing habit, and does not require mowing if a natural groundcover look is desired. Plants are easily trimmed back where needed along walks, borders or between pavers or stepping stones.

Mulching

No mulching is required (or recommended) for Ruschia 'Nana'.

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