

# GROWING *Cycads in the Home Garden* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

*Submitted by Dale Holton*

In these days of uncertainty regarding watering restrictions of home gardens, one should consider the use of cycads in the landscape. Most cycads are quite tolerant of droughts. Many of the cycads that are in the ground at my home get watered whenever it rains. They may not grow quite as fast as they would if I irrigated them but, just the same, they do well and look good with little care. They are also quite tolerant of infrequent fertilizer applications. Nearly all cycads are very intolerant of flooding. Two to three hours of flooding usually will destroy them.

If you want to grow cycads, you must first decide how much room you can allot for them. Someone with a large yard can choose among a much larger selection. You also must decide how much money you wish to spend on them. Unlike palms and most other plants, cycads are a very ancient group of plants and some can be quite costly.

For the average person with a small yard, the Caribbean *Zamias* would be the most suitable. Most are small and can tolerate full sun or shade. Some are very salt tolerant. Most grow fairly fast and won't cause you to have to get a second mortgage to purchase them.

*Ceratozamia*s are another good group of cycads to consider. Most prefer some shade and range in size from medium to quite large. Prices are usually higher than the Caribbean *Zamias* and some can be very expensive. *Ceratozamia*s are included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix I and protected by international law. They cannot be imported or exported without permits which are almost impossible to get. Some of the more common ones stay relatively small and have very attractive copper colored new leaves. Some of the rarer ones have glaucous new leaves.

*Dioons* are another very nice group of cycads that I highly recommend. I like them as replacements for *Cycas*, because the Asian Scale usually doesn't bother them. Some of these get large like the *Cycas*. Others are smaller. Most grow very slowly and would not present a size problem for many years. The more common varieties are very reasonably priced but the rarer ones are more expensive. Most will tolerate full sun or shade.

*Encephalartos* are the one group of cycads that seem to be most in demand. Most of them require a large area because they can get quite large. The green varieties are the most easily obtained and, depending on size and species, can be affordable. I cannot stress too much that some of them need lots of room. Some of these can get mature leaves of 18 to 22 feet, with a plant spread of this much. Others have more manageable size in the 4 to 5 foot range. The most sought after are the "blue" ones. They are more difficult to grow in South Florida and do better in California where it is cooler and drier. In our location, I suggest planting these blue plants on berms made of white sand or other good draining material.

*Macrozamia*s all come from Australia. I have not had real good luck with this group of plants, but have seen some very nice ones growing locally. I continue to try growing these with the hope that I will find out what I am doing wrong.

There are a few other groups which I will not mention because I do not consider most of them landscape plants, but rather collector plants.

**Editor's Note:** CITES is an international agreement between governments that was adopted in 1973. It lists plants and animals that are or may be at risk for extinction or need protection from illegal exploitation. CITES Appendix I lists species that are threatened with extinction and are or may be affected by trade. For more information on CITES, you may go to <http://www.cites.org/eng/app/index.shtml>.

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**Well-adapted *Zamias* for Palm Beach County**

*Photographs by Dale Holton*



*Zamia vazquezii*



*Zamia floridana*



*Zamia pumila*



*Zamia furfuracea*