

GROWING *Dioon merolae* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Dioon merolae is a very distinctive cycad. It is easy to recognize due to its leaflets being oriented like an open venetian blind. Each leaflet is held parallel to its adjacent leaflet. The leaves are dark green and are covered with a fine dense tomentum. Unlike some of the larger *Dioons* which grow well in Palm Beach County, *Dioon merolae* is a manageable size with its 3' long leaves arranged in a formal rosette.

Dioon merolae is native to Chiapas and Oaxaca, Mexico. It grows in well drained open pine-oak forest at

elevations of 2,000 to 4,000 feet. In habitat, the stems can grow 8 to 16 inches in diameter and 10 feet tall. Very old specimens can sucker and grow stems at odd angles. It is considered threatened in the wild and can be difficult to find for sale. It was first officially described to science in 1981.



***Dioon merolae* growing at Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden.**

(Photo by Charlie Beck)

GROWING CONDITIONS IN OUR GARDEN FOR <i>Dioon merolae</i>	
Location	4 miles from ocean in suburban Lantana
Soil	Shell rock fill
Irrigation	¾ inch applied twice a week
Fertilization	3 times a year with Palm special analysis
Light	Full sun to partial shade
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None observed
Insect Damage	None observed
Hurricane Resistance	Good

We have 3 specimens growing in our garden. They are planted in an area close to the house. Shell rock was brought in to raise the house foundation 3 feet above adjacent land. We planted our *Dioon merolae* 11 years ago in this highly alkaline compacted soil. They were originally planted in full sun but are now lightly shaded by *Coccothrinax* palms. They have thrived in these conditions and have outgrown *D. edule*, *D. agustifolia*, and *D. califanoi* in our garden.

Grow *Dioon merolae* for its formal appearance, distinctive leaflet structure, and manageable size. It is a good replacement for the scale prone *Cycas revoluta*.



Eleven year old Dioon merolae in the Beck garden. (Photos by Charlie Beck)



Female cone



Male cone



Dioon merolae leaf detail