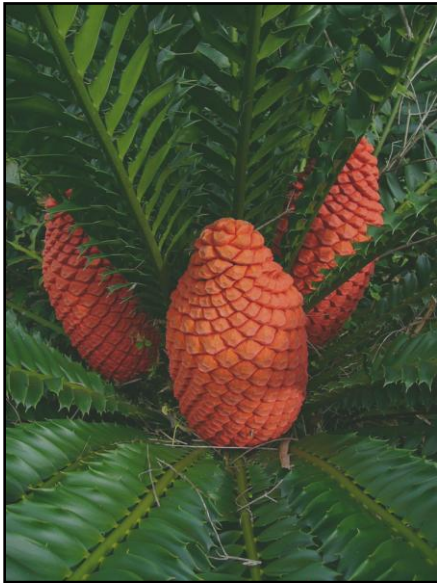


GROWING
Encephalartos ferox
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

This beautiful cycad, which is native to South Africa, grows well in Palm Beach County. In a publication produced while he was with the University of Florida Miami-Dade Extension, Jody Haynes stated that this cycad is one of the most sought-after and unusual cycads in South Florida.



Our garden soil consists of a few feet of sand over a layer of hardpan. This is typical pineland flatwood habitat found in Palm Beach County. Since our yard is prone to flooding, I raised the ground level by creating a small mound to plant this cycad in 1997 from a seven gallon container (See photograph on page 11). Even planted on this mound, the cycad still experiences flood conditions during periods of heavy rain. This inundation does not set back growth of the cycad. While the cycad was originally planted in full sun, it is now in partial shade.

Care of this cycad is limited to irrigation and fertilization. I do provide supplemental irrigation during dry periods at a rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water applied twice a week. I fertilize the cycad three times a year with Palm Special analysis as recommended by the University of Florida. No micronutrient deficiencies have been observed on this cycad.

The stems and leaves of this cycad are impressive. My cycad stem is 22 inches in diameter and 18 inches tall. The leaves on my plant grow up to six feet long and the leaflets are dark green and sharply barbed.

Both male and female cycads usually produce one to three cones but older plants can produce more. The color of male cones can range from yellow to scarlet and the color of female cones can range from yellow to bright red. While my female plant produced a cone after seven years, it now produces three bright red cones 11 years after planting. The cones measure a base diameter of eight inches and a length of 16 inches. These cones are showy for several months of the year. While the female cones will always pro-

duce seeds, they are not viable unless they have been successfully pollinated.

According to Loran M. Whitelock, these cycads rarely sucker from the base. However, our cycad is producing one pup.

This cycad sustained no damage during the three Category 1 hurricanes we experienced.

ADDITIONAL ECEPHALATOS FEROX FACTS:

I have noticed cardinal's successfully nesting on the leaflets (See page 2). The sharp barbs on the leaves discourage raccoons and other predators from disturbing the • nest.

- The stems, with pith that is almost pure starch, are processed into flour and used in food in Mozambique.
- Baboons, vervet monkeys, fruit-eating bats and birds eat the fleshy cover of the seeds in Africa.
- The University of Miami School of Medicine has looked at extracts from this cycad that may be efficacious in treating estrogen-dependent tumors.
- The South African Botanical Diversity Network has this cycad listed on its list of threatened plants.

ENCEPHALARTOS FEROX GROWTH



1997 (Yardstick on left)



2008 (Yardstick on right)

Photographs by Charlie Beck