

## GROWING *Encephalartos princeps* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

*Submitted by Charlie Beck*

*Encephalartos princeps* is one of the silver cycads native to South Africa. *E. princeps* grows in desert like areas at 2,500' elevation with annual rainfall of 18-20'' per annum. In habitat summers are hot and winters are very cold, so it can withstand several degrees of frost. Due to poaching, *E. princeps* is considered threatened in its native range.

*E. princeps* is closely allied to *E. lehmannii* and *E. trispinosus*. *E. princeps* was separated as a species from *E. lehmannii* in 1965. *E. princeps* is more robust and grows taller than *E. lehmannii*. In habitat *E. princeps* grows on dolerite outcrops and *E. lehmannii* is found on sandstone formations. There are also differences in leaflet spacing.

Stems can grow 10-16' tall and can measure 12-16'' in diameter. Stems are arborescent and are usually clumping. Cones are olive green and may number up to three. Leaflets are densely spaced and overlap in the top third of the leaf. At maturity leaves grow 3-4' long. Leaves emerge silver but turn a dull green as they age.

We have two 6 year old specimens of *E. princeps* growing in our garden. Both are planted in non-irrigated areas. One specimen is planted on a mound of 50/50 mix of sand and pea gravel. The other is planted on a high mound of hardpan soil that was brought to the surface when our drain field was constructed. Both are located in full sun. The plant in the 50/50 mix is growing a little faster probably due to the increased drainage and the high soil PH. Due to our heavy summer rain neither of our plants show a silver color, but on a recent trip to Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden I got a good photo of an old specimen shown on our newsletter cover.

*E. princeps* can be found for sale in South Florida. A little persistence may be required to locate this cycad. It may be expensive but it's a good investment considering its relative robust growth. Remember excellent drainage and full sun are optimum growing conditions.



*Encephalartos princeps*  
at Fairchild Tropical Botanical  
Garden cycad circle.



*Encephalartos princeps* in the Beck garden (six years old).