

GROWING *Zamia pseudoparasitica* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Dale Holton

Zamia pseudoparasitica was first described in 1854, by James Yates. This is the only known epiphytic cycad. It grows only in the trees in a cloud forest on the Northern slope of the Cordillera Central, in Panama. This cycad is usually found 30 or more feet above ground amongst other epiphytic plants. The seeds are most likely dropped in or around Bromeliads by birds. No living plants have ever been found growing on the ground.

On a recent trip to the habitat of these plants, we traveled a new road which was being constructed through the mountains from San Jose to the Atlantic coast. On this road I saw a few of the plants high up in the trees. They were hard to spot since there are many other plants sharing the same trees.

This *Zamia* is not currently listed as endangered, but upon completion of the road, the forest will almost surely be cut down even though it is National Forest land. The locals scoffed at us when we suggested this would happen. However, in another National Forest that we visited earlier in the trip, trees had been removed and the land was being used as grazing land.

In a recent article in the Cycad Journal, a plant was documented that had a major root extending some thirty feet to the ground. This had never before been seen. Plants that are displaced and fall to the ground do not survive.

I personally didn't try to grow these *Zamias* for several years as I assumed it would be too difficult to keep alive. Then one day I saw that Jeff Marcus had seedlings for sale at a reasonable price, so I ordered some of them. When they arrived, they each had one leaf. I potted them in pure Perlite with some Nutricote in one gallon pots. Much to my surprise, they thrived. They do need some shade. The forest where they come from is quite dense and is engulfed in clouds much of the time. After I realized that I could grow these magnificent plants, I traded for a large male plant in a seven gallon pot. To my surprise it was potted in potting soil and seemed quite happy. I personally would not recommend this. I later acquired another large male plant that is potted in a large pot with a coarse orchid mix. Sometime after that I got another large pot containing a male and female plant in the same pot. I keep these plants out of doors year around and have not seen any damage in the winters. I do water these plants daily and have lost a few plants that I didn't keep moist. I have pollinated cones on this plant three times and never got viable seed. Last year I pollinated it again and now have a very large cone that I think will have viable seeds.

I keep all the plants that I have for sale in wooden baskets with a coarse orchid mix. These plants will die if allowed to dry out for extended periods. They also should be grown high enough that the leaves do not touch the ground. As the plants get larger, the leaves get longer and could easily reach six feet or more.



Zamia pseudoparasitica
growing in habitat in Panama.
(Photo by Dale Holton)



Zamia pseudoparasitica growing in Holton garden.
(Photo by Dale Holton)



Zamia pseudoparasitica female cone
in the Holton garden
(Photo by Dale Holton).