

Sago Palms

Cycads are one of the oldest living plant families. They have been around for thousands of years. They are also one of the slowest growing plants. Plant them in loose potting soil. They prefer good drainage. Most cycads will grow in full sun along the coast, but inland would be best in partial shade. They make excellent container plants because of their interesting character. Established plants will usually need water only once a week, unless it is extremely warm, and less often in the winter. Because they usually only send out one set of leaves a year, (usually May to August) feeding is only necessary from March to October. Use a general purpose fertilizer, fairly high in nitrogen. Osmocote 14-14-14 is an excellent slow release plant food which you will only need to use two or three times a year. If your cycads are grown in a very warm protected area it is possible to occasionally get two sets of leaves in one year.

The most common insect on cycads seems to be scale. It is not a terrible problem but if it shows up, Malathion will take care of the problem. Follow label directions carefully for mixing, and do not spray if the soil is dry or the temperature is above 85 degrees F.

When a new set of leaves is about 75% developed, remove all of the old leaves. Cut them as close to the trunk as possible. This allows room for the new set of leaves and the old ones would soon turn yellow and brown if left on the plant. Do not keep the plant in too much shade, especially when the new leaves are forming. The foliage will become elongated and very spindly.

Cycads are dioecious, meaning there are male and female plants and there must be one of each to produce viable seed. The blooms of each sex are different. The male bloom is usually long and produces the pollen which is carried to the female plant by insects and wind. Only the female plant is able to produce seed.

Cycas revoluta or 'Sago Palm' is the most common of the cycads in this area. They are native to areas of southern Japan to Java. There are some very old plants in southern California. When they get very old they often branch and have offshoots or "pups". These form at the soil level and can be removed when they reach the size of a baseball. It is best if the pups are kept in a greenhouse until they become established.