



Natal Cycad

Encephalartos natalensis

Height: 20 feet

Spread: 15 feet

Sunlight: ☉ ●

Hardiness Zone: 9a

Other Names: Giant Cycad

Description:

A slow growing cycad with elegant green leaves that emerge upright but then relax outward over time; develops a trunk over a long period; an attractive accent for a large garden area; must be well drained; tolerant of light frost

Ornamental Features

Natal Cycad is primarily grown for its highly ornamental fruit. The orange fruits with hints of yellow and which fade to brown over time are held in abundance in spectacular cones from early spring to early summer. It has attractive green evergreen foliage. The large spiny narrow pinnately compound leaves are highly ornamental and remain green throughout the winter. The rough bark and dark brown branches add an interesting dimension to the landscape.

Landscape Attributes

Natal Cycad is a spreading evergreen shrub with a shapely form and gracefully arching branches. Its relatively fine texture sets it apart from other landscape plants with less refined foliage.

This is a relatively low maintenance shrub, and should never be pruned except to remove any dieback, as it tends not to take pruning well. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Spiny



Natal Cycad

Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



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Natal Cycad is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Natal Cycad will grow to be about 20 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 15 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 2 feet from the ground, and is suitable for planting under power lines. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 70 years or more. This is a dioecious species, meaning that individual plants are either male or female. Only the females will produce fruit, and a male variety of the same species is required nearby as a pollinator.



Natal Cycad in bloom
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

This shrub does best in full sun to partial shade. It prefers dry to average moisture levels with very well-drained soil, and will often die in standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for xeriscaping or the moisture-conserving landscape. It is not particular as to soil type, but has a definite preference for acidic soils. It is quite intolerant of urban pollution, therefore inner city or urban streetside plantings are best avoided. This species is not originally from North America. It can be propagated by division.

Natal Cycad makes a fine choice for the outdoor landscape, but it is also well-suited for use in outdoor pots and containers. Because of its height, it is often used as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when grown in a container, it may not perform exactly as indicated on the tag - this is to be expected. Also note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.