



## Cycas revoluta - Sago Palm / Cycad

*Cycas revoluta*, one of the most primitive living seed plants, are very unusual and popular ornamentals. A rugged trunk, topped with whorled feathery leaves has lead to the common name "Sago Palm". Often called "living fossils", Cycads have changed very little in the last 200 million years.

Regardless of age or size, *Cycas revoluta* is one of the easiest plants to grow, indoors or out, by beginner or expert. This subtropical adapts to a wide range of temperatures from -11 to 42° C, accepts full sun or bright interior light, thrives with attention, and tolerates neglect. In addition, Cycads are extremely long-lived. A 220 year old specimen of *Encephalartos*, a relative of *Cycas revoluta*, is on display at the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew England.



### Growth Habit:

New leaves emerge all at once in a circular pattern, and are very tender until they begin to harden several weeks later. Do not disturb or repot the plant during this period. If light is coming from a window, give the plant a 1/4 turn each day until the new leaves harden, otherwise they may lean toward the light source. If kept in low light the plant will produce long leaves, and if kept in bright light, the leaves will stay shorter.

Rate of growth is extremely slow. When grown as potted indoor specimens, Cycads may add only one set of new leaves every year or two and remain somewhat the same size (one reason they are excellent for bonsai).

Soil should be well drained and rich in humus, although these durable plants seem to grow in almost anything. In the landscape or garden, be sure to plant Cycads slightly above the soil line and not in a hole or depression which retains water or is "swampy". They much prefer to be on the dry than the wet side.

Repotting is best done in spring or summer. Cycads prefer to be root bound and should be repotted into a container only slightly larger than the root system. If roots are trimmed for bonsai use, remove a comparable amount of lower leaves.

Pruning leaves and "sprucing up" your Cycad should be done at least once a year. Oldest and lowest leaves eventually have brown tips or turn brown (to allow the plant energy to go to growing new leaves) and should be removed. Cut as close to the trunk as possible. Old leaves may turn yellow from over watering or too much fertilizer. New leaves may turn yellow from excess fertilizer or poor soil conditions. Once leaves turn yellow or brown, they should be removed from the plant.

Insects are limited to scale (can form a white or gray crust) or occasional attacks of mealy bugs.

## Watering and Feeding:

Generally, Cycads should be treated as a cactus and watered when almost dry.

If grown in a container, allow the soil to become almost dry, then water thoroughly slowly adding water around the top of the soil. If the plant is receiving morning or afternoon sun or temperatures are warm, they may need to be watered at least weekly. Plants grown in low light or cool temperatures may need water every few weeks or so. If planted in the garden, water when dry, but do not keep continuously wet. Established plants can easily survive drought conditions.

Fertilizer is generally applied during spring and late summer. Too little plant food is far better than too much. If organic or slow release fertilizer is used, do not allow any to fall into the plant crown which is protecting the formation of future leaves.