

Cycads

Cycads are one of the oldest living plant families. They've been around for millions of years.

These plants will do best if planted in a soil that drains well. They can be grown in the ground in most of the San Diego area. They do best if they get full sun along the coastal areas, however inland they usually look better if they get a little shade. They are a little darker green under those conditions. Cycads also make excellent container plants. They will require watering weekly unless it is unusually warm.

They usually send out only one set of leaves each year from May through August. Feeding is only necessary from March to October. Generally a multipurpose fertilizer, high in nitrogen is preferred. A 16-16-16 formula dry fertilizer every two months is about all you need. Be careful not to overfeed, especially if plants are in containers.

When a new set of leaves is about 75% developed, remove all of the old leaves, cutting them as close to the trunk as possible. Old leaves will turn yellow and brown rapidly if left on the plant. If the plant is in a pot, in a shaded area when new growth starts, try to move it to a brighter area or the new growth will be weak and spindly. After the new fronds have "hardened", you can move it back to a little more shade.

Cycads are dioecious, meaning there are male and female plants. Both are needed to produce viable seed. The blooms of each sex are different and they only bloom when mature (between 15-20 years old). The male bloom is a long cone, and comes out of the center of the plant (where new leaves are generally formed). The female plant forms a large "fuzzy ball" when it blooms, which will produce seed. There has to be a male bloom nearby to have pollination. In most cases a plant that blooms will not send out new foliage.

The most common insect is scale. It is usually not a terrible problem; however, if you see some, it is best to get it under control as soon as possible. Malathion used about seven days apart will normally control it with two applications. Do not spray, however, if the temperature is more than 80 degrees. Also be sure the soil is not dry if you spray. Follow the label directions carefully for proper mixing.