Whitelock's Cycad

Encephalartos whitelockii

Height: 30 feet

Spread: 20 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 9

Other Names: Uganda Giant Cycad

Description:

A large and showy cycad, with extremely long, pinnate green leaves; forms a thick trunk over a very long time period, that tends to be solitary; an impressive large landscape accent; very adaptable, but must be well drained, tolerant of light frost



Whitelock's Cycad
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Ornamental Features

Whitelock's Cycad has attractive bluish-green foliage with lime green undersides on a tree with the bulk of the canopy held atop a towering trunk or stem. The enormous spiny narrow pinnately compound leaves are highly ornamental and remain bluish-green throughout the winter. The bluish-green fruits with buttery yellow overtones are held in cones from late winter to late summer. The rough bark and brown branches add an interesting dimension to the landscape.



Whitelock's Cycad fruit
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Landscape Attributes

Whitelock's Cycad is an open evergreen tree with a strong central leader and a towering form, with a high canopy of foliage concentrated at the top of the plant. Its relatively fine texture sets it apart from other landscape plants with less refined foliage.

This is a relatively low maintenance tree, and should never be pruned except to remove any dieback, as it tends not to take pruning well. It has no significant negative characteristics.

Whitelock's Cycad is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Whitelock's Cycad will grow to be about 30 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 20 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 4 feet from the ground, and should not be planted underneath power lines. It grows at a fast rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live to a ripe old age of 200 years or more; think of this as a heritage tree for future generations! 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.

This tree does best in full sun to partial shade. It does best in average to evenly moist conditions, but will not tolerate standing water. It may require supplemental watering during periods of drought or extended heat. It is particular about its soil conditions, with a strong preference for rich, 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, and parts of it are known to be toxic to humans and animals, so care should be exercised in planting it around children and pets. It can be propagated by division.

Whitelock's Cycad is a fine choice for the yard, but it is also a good selection for planting 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.