Blue South African Cycad

Encephalartos princeps



Blue South African Cycad
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 5 feet

Spread: 6 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 9

Description:

A medium sized cycad with spiny, intensely silver-blue leaves with gray-green undersides; develops a short trunk over a long period; an attractive accent or container plant; responds best to deep, rich, well drained soil; tolerant of light frost

Ornamental Features

Blue South African Cycad's attractive large spiny narrow pinnately compound leaves remain silvery blue in color with curious grayish green undersides and tinges of powder blue throughout the year on a plant with an arching habit of growth. The bluish-green fruits which fade to tan over time are held in cones from late winter to mid fall.

Landscape Attributes

Blue South African Cycad is a spreading evergreen perennial with a shapely form and gracefully arching foliage. Its relatively fine texture sets it apart from other garden plants with less refined foliage.

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, 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

Blue South African Cycad is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Rock/Alpine Gardens
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Blue South African Cycad will grow to be about 5 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 6 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 1 foot from the ground. It grows at a slow rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 70 years or more. As an evegreen perennial, this plant will typically keep its form and foliage year-round. 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 plant 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 a low-water garden or xeriscape application. This plant should not require much in the way of fertilizing once established, although it may appreciate a shot of general-purpose fertilizer from time to time early in the growing season. It is not particular as to soil pH, but grows best in rich soils. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This species is not originally from North America. It can be propagated by division.

Blue South African Cycad is a fine choice for the garden, 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 growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.