

10 Best Tips for Growing Cycads

When you grow a cycad, you preserve an endangered species. And if you follow some simple tips, a cycad can grow into a legacy for your grandchildren's grandchildren, living for hundreds of years, a beautiful voice from prehistoric times. Cycads are easy to grow, need minimal maintenance, conserve water, and can make a dramatic addition to your landscape.

These growing tips should help start you on the path to growing happy, healthy cycads!



Pick the Right Time & Place:

- 1. Plant (or transplant) your cycad when it's warm.** Usually best from March through October.
- 2. Choose the right plant for your spot--or the right spot for your plant.** Certain cycads thrive in full sun while others prefer more shade. Some grow compact, while others grow long leaves. Some are soft-textured, some are thorny. We have developed a [Find My Perfect Plant](#) tool to help you select the right cycad for your location, landscape and climate.

Prepare Your Site:

3. Enrich your soil. Place a layer of organic mulch on top of your soil, and water it in regularly. This mulch layer will interact with the base soil, allowing nutrients to percolate into, enrich and aerate the soil. You can accelerate this effect if you apply fertilizer prior to applying mulch and watering.



4. Provide excellent drainage and mound your soil. Your cycad will be happier and healthier if it has good drainage. To achieve this, dig a hole no deeper than the cycad's root ball, fill the hole's bottom half with coarse gravel, then place your plant on top of the gravel. At this point, half of the cycad's root ball will be above your original soil line. Fill the rest of the hole with a mix of composted soil and a very porous potting soil mix. Then, mound a 50/50 blend of your garden soil and the porous soil mix, up and around the plant, until at least half of the caudex (trunk) is covered by the mounded soil blend.



Planting your cycad this way will provide the drainage and air circulation your cycad needs to establish itself well. If the existing soil at your site is particularly claylike or drains poorly, this planting method can save your cycad!

Prepare Your Cycad for Planting:

5. Fungicide + Rooting Hormones = better transplanting results.

Cycads, like many other plants, benefit from certain treatments before you plant them.

If you're transplanting from a pot, ease the cycad out of its pot, and dust, soak, or spray our root ball with fungicide and rooting hormone, both available from nursery supply outlets. Use clean and sterile equipment when possible. For a bare-root cycads, or cycads dug from another location in the ground, will benefit from fungicide-rooting hormone **soak**, to limit fungal infection and encourage new root development. Seal any significant root breakage with tree sealer.



6. Protect the caudex! This is a challenge for some cycad collectors, who like to expose a plant's caudex to make it look bigger. However, if you cover the caudex with coarse well-draining soil, your cycad will grow faster, and your plant will ultimately be larger above ground and healthier than if you had deliberately exposed its caudex. Covering *at least half* the plant's trunk with soil is particularly important for plants with caudexes smaller than 10"-14" in diameter (before they have formed a trunk that's taller than it is wide). Think of the caudex as a world globe, and make sure that your *soil* line is as high as the equator—if not higher. Covering the caudex with a quality, porous soil protects the plant from summer heat and winter cold.



Think Long-Term:

7. Consider planting seedlings in the ground. If your site and garden design can accommodate this, you will benefit because cycads grow much faster in the ground than they do in pots.

Prepare your soil, provide drainage and use a fungicide-rooting hormone soak as you would with mature cycads. Place your seedling carefully in the hole you've prepared. **It is vitally important that you transplant the seedling with its caudex below the soil line.** The new soil should cover the plant up to where the leaves are green. If the caudex or the portion of the leaves with yellow or white color is left exposed to the sun, this can burn the young plant to burn in summer or freeze it in the winter.



8. Prepare for a shock—but don't despair. Once a seedling has been planted in the ground, it may show the symptoms of transplant shock, particularly if the plant came from a lower light or greenhouse environment. However, even as the old leaves die back, they continue to photosynthesize, providing growth and strength for a new set of leaves in the next growing season. Those new leaves will typically emerge more compact as well as more sun- and wind-tolerant.

Be Attentive (But Not TOO Attentive):

9. A little fertilizer never hurts. Cycads are ideal for a low maintenance garden, but if you want them to be extra healthy, consider their unique fertilizer requirements. You can find more information about fertilizing cycads in the [Plant Care](#) section on our website.

10. Don't overwater! Here in Southern California, at the height of summer when we get no rainfall, we may water our cycads a few times per week. However, during the winter, we water as infrequently as once monthly. Don't water cycads directly into their crown, particularly in cool weather. Another reason for good drainage is that cycads don't like to be too wet in cool weather.

Finally:

Have fun! Not only will your cycads become distinctive and attractive features in your garden, you can also feel good about helping preserve endangered species. If it weren't for people like you taking the time to learn about and grow these plants, they might be lost forever. Enjoy your cycads! And spread the word about these exciting plants to the other plant-lovers in your life.

