

PALM LITERATURE

PALMS AND CYCADS: A COMPLETE GUIDE TO SELECTING, GROWING AND PROPAGATING. David Squire. Ball Publishing, Batavia, Illinois. 2007. ISBN 978-1-883052-56-0. Price \$29.95. Hardcover. Pp.160.

The appearance of another palm and cycad book begs the question, Is yet another guide to palms and cycads really necessary? What void in the many guidebooks already available is left to fill? The answer is extensive horticultural information. In most of these guidebooks, botanical descriptions and photographs are the focus, and horticultural recommendations are limited to tidbits about the plant's native habitat or length of time until seeds germinate. I commend Squire on his attempt to fill this void in this highly accessible publication. A full one quarter of the book's pages are dedicated to explaining how palms and cycads grow and how to grow them. The remainder of the book profiles 100 palm and 18 cycad species. For each, he includes a photograph, a descriptive paragraph and a "fact file" box, which is the best feature of the book. The box neatly organizes information on each species' overall dimensions, preferred growing conditions, ornamental or practical uses, propagation, place of origin and USA hardiness zone. What Squire has written is a lay person's handbook with minimal botanical terms to complicate the text. In fact, his book is best suited to someone just getting started growing these magnificent plants. In the introductory chapters, topics covered are basic botany, buying plants, planting and caring for them, pests and propagation. He also presents lists of palms and cycads for specific uses: houseplants, hedges, groundcovers, etc.

While I commend Squire on his attempt to fill the horticultural information void, his effort is not altogether a blazing success. Broad horticultural generalizations are made throughout the introductory chapters, but horticultural techniques do not translate the world over. Growing conditions – temperature,

rain, soil, seasonality – are just too variable. For example, Squire's recommendation of using a high nitrogen fertilizer to maintain palms may be fine for some soils but could actually be lethal on South Florida's limestone soils. Thus, palm and cycad horticulture is best treated on a regional basis. South Floridians are lucky to have Broschat and Meerow's *Ornamental Palm Horticulture*, which is a comprehensive guide to growing here.

Squire's selection of profiled species is good though not exceptional. The most common species are included, as they should be. The selection is weighted a bit heavily toward some genera (*Arenga* and *Phoenix* in particular), while some important genera are left out (for example, *Veitchia*). The selection of cycad species is altogether displeasing. Some of the most common and easiest to cultivate species are omitted (e.g., *Encephalartos ferox*, *E. gratus*, *Zamia furfuracea*), and only one *Zamia* species is included.

On a technical note, *Palms and Cycads* is poorly edited. There are tables without any headings, inconsistencies in spelling and outdated nomenclature. The photographs are mediocre for a book which might be considered a "picture book." There are also several glaring errors in the text. For example, the photograph included for *Cycas media* is in fact an image of a *Macrozamia* species. And do not read the back cover if you want to know what the book contains. The back cover boasts of 184 palm and 35 cycad profiles, when really there are only 100 and 18, respectively.

The book has lots of good information, but bad information is peppered among the good. The only way to distinguish between the two is to know which is good and which is bad. If you already know that, then you probably are too advanced for this book. My advice is stick to some of the better guide books already on the shelf.

CHRISTIE JONES
Curator of Palms and Cycads
Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden