

Coontie

Zamia pumila (Z. floridana)

Plant Description: Coontie is an evergreen, palm-like plant known as a cycad. Cycads are a general group of plants that produce cones instead of flowers, and the Coontie happens to be Florida's only native cycad. Unlike Sago cycads, Coontie may resemble a fern having both a soft appearance and a soft touch. Over time, the plant produces suckers to form a mounding shrub. The rusty brown cones provide winter interest, while the bright red-orange seeds produced on female cones further add to this plant's attractiveness.

Mature Size: 1-5 feet tall; 3-5 foot spread

Growth Rate: Moderate

Plant Habit: Mounding

Plant Spacing: 1-2 feet (minimum)

Ornamental Characteristics & Uses:

Foliage Color: Dark green



Cones: Rusty brown male and female cones emerge in late winter; bright red-orange seeds develop and ripen by the following autumn.

Attracts Wildlife: Birds; larval food plant for the Atala butterfly (S. Florida only)

Uses: Woodland and shade gardens; tropical gardens; low maintenance groundcover; containers; coastal landscapes (moderately salt tolerant); floral arrangement greenery

Growing Requirements:

Cold Hardiness Zone(s): 8B-11

Hardy Temp: 15°F (cold damage may occur in the 20's)

Exposure: Tolerates full sun to deep shade; partial sun is best

Water Needs: Low; very drought tolerant

Soil Tolerances: Grows in any soil type.

Soil pH: Acid to Alkaline

Maintenance: Easy/Low

General Care & Growing Tips:

Coonties prefer well-drained soil. Enrich the soil with a small amount of organic material, such as compost, and select a fertilizer with ammoniacal nitrogen rather than nitrate nitrogen to enhance growth. This plant can be propagated from seed, although seeds are slow and sometimes difficult to germinate. Removing the fleshy seed coating, either mechanically or by soaking, will hasten germination.



Common Pests:

Watch for scales and mealybugs. Possibly signs of an insect infestation include irregular yellow patches on leaves and/or black, sooty mold growth. Caterpillars of the Atala butterfly will defoliate leaves but do not kill plants. Therefore, other than possible relocation of the caterpillars, management is typically not needed.

Reference: Culbert, D. F. (1995). *Florida Coonties and Atala Butterflies*. University of Florida.
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg347>

Photos by: Alicia Lamborn