

August, there is no reason to wait until then. Think of how many you can have if you start early! The mind boggles at the prospect. Surplus plants can be sold at club sales & meetings, traded or donated. Until every yard in Central & South Florida has Crotons in it, our job is not done.

Calendar of upcoming events

March 11th: CENTRAL FLORIDA PALM SOCIETY MEETING (Tampa)

March 11th – 13th: SELBY BOTANICAL GARDENS SPRING SALE (Sarasota) 941/366-5731

March 18th: CROTON SOCIETY MEETING. 1:30 p.m. University of South Florida (Tampa) Botanical Garden Pavilion. 813/974-2329

April 8th & 9th: USF SPRING SALE (Tampa) 813/974-2329

Items for inclusion: If you know of any upcoming horticulture-related events, please submit them to the Upcoming Calendar. We publish quarterly.

Identifying Crotons

as told by Bob Alonzo to Rick Blauman

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second part in a continuing series of tips and lessons on identifying Crotons. Honorary member, Bob Alonzo has been touted as being the best of the best when it comes to correctly identifying these plants. He has graciously given his time to be interviewed to share his knowledge with fellow Croton Society members. Look for the series in each edition.

Long, Narrow Leaf with "Shoulders" & Stripes and/or Spots

(This group is originally from the same batch of seeds from Henry Coppinger of Miami. All are frequently encountered, particularly the first two).

Eleanor Roosevelt – Has long green leaves with prolific bright yellow spots

throughout. Older leaves may have a reddish tint on the undersides.

Franklin Roosevelt – New Growth is green with yellow spots, but soon ages to deep red with pinkish spots. Leaf is typically wider than the others in this group.

Golden Glow – Dark green with creamy pink/orange blotches.

Joanna Coppinger – Green with irregular yellow/orange/pink mid stripe. Edges have spots of the same colors. Yellow turns to pink with age.

Yellow Joanna Coppinger – Green with yellow markings, similar to the above plant, but lacking the other colors.

Reliance – A Joanna Coppinger sport that has a narrow mid-stripe of orange/yellow with little if any spotting on the green edges.

Cycads, Companion Plants For Crotons

by: Tom Broom, Polk City FL

Cycads make great companion plants to grow along with your Crotons, many cycads are fairly tropical plants and are grown in the same areas of the world. For the most part, cycads will be colder hardy than crotons, so they will not need as much protection as crotons if you grow them where freezes are possible. Large cycads can be a main focal point in a landscape, with the crotons planted near by for a colorful accent. Small cycads can be planted amongst larger crotons to fill in areas in the landscape.

Cycads are cone-bearing plants that date back to 250 million years. They are the oldest, living, seed bearing plants on earth. Their closest relatives are the pine trees and other conifers. Cycads are very easy plants to grow. In habitat, they live in areas where the faster growing flowering plants will not overtake them. They can grow in the worst soil conditions in the world.

Usually, they live in pure sand, and sometimes they can be found growing on solid rock. Because of this, they are perfect for growing in sandy Florida soils. One reason why they can survive such conditions is that they have a specialized root system called coralloid roots, that are nitrogen fixing roots which in essence produce fertilizer for the plant naturally.

There are several unusual cycad species that can be grown quite successfully in Florida, but a good supply of these plants for the landscape trade might be several years coming. I am going to discuss five species that will work well in our landscapes, and either have a widespread availability already, or will have in the next few years. These plants are listed in the order of the most available to the least available at this time.

Dioon edule is probably top on the list for cold hardiness of all the cycads that grow well in Florida. After the freeze of 1989 my king sago were totally defoliated. My *Dioon edule* plants did not even get tip burn at 17°F. I know of people who have tested this plant down to 10°F. In habitat, these plants grow in sandy areas, and sometimes on rocks over looking the Gulf of Mexico, also showing their great salt tolerance. In fact, they will grow well in almost any kind of soil that drains well. Barring any insect or pathogen damage, these plants will live for 1500 years with no real care at all. *Dioon edule* has the general appearance of the king sago, with lighter green foliage. These plants are available all over the state by wholesale nurseries that carry other more, well known cycads.

Cycas taitungensis, commonly known as the Prince Sago, or the Emperor Sago is starting to be widely used in areas where a larger, but cold hardy cycad is needed. The leaf spread of the King Sago will normally be around six feet wide, where the spread on this species will be around eleven feet wide. The foliage has been found to be slightly less frost tolerant compared to the king, but the stems have found to be more cold hardy. People have been growing these plants as a test in Atlanta and in central Alabama. This species is