Zamia furfuracea Cardboard Plant, Cardboard Cycad

Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

The rigid, woody, medium-green foliage of cardboard plant emerges from a large underground storage root and forms a loose, spreading, symmetrical rosette (Fig. 1). Providing a tropical landscape effect, cardboard plant's mounding growth habit is ideally suited for use in containers or as a specimen. Several can be planted together for a lush, tropical effect. They also create a dramatic effect when mass-planted in a shrub border, eventually reaching to six or eight feet tall. Plant on three- to five-foot centers to create a mass planting.

General Information

Scientific name: Zamia furfuracea
Pronunciation: ZAY-mee-uh fer-fer-Ray-see-uh
Common name(s): cardboard plant, cardboard cycad
Family: Zamiaceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; specimen; suitable for growing indoors; accent
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Figure 1. Cardboard plant

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.


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**Description**

*Height:* 2 to 5 feet  
*Spread:* 5 to 8 feet  
*Plant habit:* round  
*Plant density:* moderate  
*Growth rate:* slow  
*Texture:* coarse

**Foliage**

*Leaf arrangement:* spiral  
*Leaf type:* even-pinnately compound  
*Leaf margin:* serrate  
*Leaf shape:* obovate  
*Leaf venation:* parallel  
*Leaf type and persistence:* evergreen  
*Leaf blade length:* 4 to 8 inches  
*Leaf color:* green  
*Fall color:* no fall color change  
*Fall characteristic:* not showy

**Flower**

*Flower color:* no flowers  
*Flower characteristic:* no flowers

**Fruit**

*Fruit shape:* elongated  
*Fruit length:* 3 to 6 inches  
*Fruit cover:* dry or hard  
*Fruit color:* red  
*Fruit characteristic:* showy

**Trunk and Branches**

*Trunk/bark/branches:* not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
*Current year stem/twig color:* not applicable  
*Current year stem/twig thickness:* not applicable

**Culture**

*Light requirement:* plant grows in part shade/part sun  
*Soil tolerances:* alkaline; sand; acidic; loam  
*Drought tolerance:* high  
*Soil salt tolerances:* good  
*Plant spacing:* 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

*Roots:* usually not a problem  
*Winter interest:* no special winter interest  
*Outstanding plant:* plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
*Invasive potential:* not known to be invasive  
*Pest resistance:* no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

**Use and Management**

Growing in full sun or shade, cardboard plant tolerates a variety of well-drained soils. Watering should be done with moderation because plants are drought-tolerant once they become established. This plant is under-utilized, probably because of the slow growth rate. But patience is rewarded because this is one of nature’s most attractive plants. It adapts easily to indoors as a house plant.

Propagation is by seed, which germinates fairly well several months after being cleaned and planted, or by division.

**Pests and Diseases**

Florida red scale is the main pest problem and can prove fatal if left unattended.

No diseases are of major concern.