Strelitzia nicolai: White Bird of Paradise

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Introduction

White Bird of Paradise is most often planted for its large, banana-like leaves and upright, clumping stalks which give an exotic feel to the landscape. Plants can reach 20 to 30 feet in height with a spread of 10 feet though they are often seen much smaller. The five to eight-foot-long, cold-tender leaves are arranged in a fanlike display from the erect trunks and appear much like traveler’s tree. The lower trunk becomes clear of leaves and exposed as the older leaves drop off. Leaves rip along the veins as they are blown by strong winds.

General Information

Scientific name: Strelitzia nicolai
Pronunciation: streh-LIT-see-uh NICK-oh-lye
Common name(s): White Bird of Paradise, giant Bird of Paradise
Family: Strelitziaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: deck or patio; specimen; container or planter; indoors
Availability: not native to North America

Description

Height: 20 to 30 feet
Spread: 6 to 10 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular

Figure 1. Middle-aged Strelitzia nicolai: white Bird of Paradise
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

Figure 2. Range
Crown shape: upright/erect, palm  
Crown density: open  
Growth rate: moderate  
Texture: coarse

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: entire  
Leaf shape: oblong  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen  
Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**

Flower color: white/cream/gray  
Flower characteristics: showy

**Fruit**

Fruit shape: unknown  
Fruit length: unknown  
Fruit covering: dry or hard  
Fruit color: brown  
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don’t droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns  
Pruning requirement: little required  
Breakage: resistant  
Current year twig color: not applicable  
Current year twig thickness:

Wood specific gravity: unknown

**Culture**

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun, or partial shade  
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Aerosol salt tolerance: low

**Other**

Roots: not a problem  
Winter interest: no  
Outstanding tree: no  
Ozone sensitivity: unknown  
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown  
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

**Use and Management**

The interesting flowers are white with a dark blue tongue. White Bird of Paradise is ideal for entranceways for a dramatic effect or for use at poolside. Plants are not messy but ragged leaves should be periodically removed for a tidy appearance. This is a large plant and should be situated accordingly.

White Bird of Paradise grows well in full sun to light shade on moist, well-drained soil. Plants should be protected from high winds to minimize torn, ragged leaves. It will survive periods of 28°F with minimal leaf burn and will quickly recover. Prune to remove dead leaves and thin out surplus growth sprouting from the base of the trunk, if you wish.

Propagation is by division of the suckers or from seed which germinate slowly.

**Pests**

Scales may infest this tree.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.