

Zamia floridana Coontie¹

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Introduction

This native of Florida is also known erroneously as *Zamia pumila*. The feather-like, light green, leathery foliage of coontie emerges from a large underground storage root in the early years before a trunk develops. Providing a tropical landscape effect, coontie's unique growth habit is ideally suited for use as a specimen or container planting. It looks particularly attractive when plants of differing sizes are planted together to form a clumping, specimen-like effect. Planted on 3- to 5-foot centers for a massing effect, it forms a 3-foot tall, medium-green ground cover. Coontie are rarely used in this manner because of the high cost of plants, but it is well worth the effort. This plant should be used more in the landscape.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Zamia floridana*: Coontie.
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf—*Zamia floridana*: Coontie.
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General Information

Scientific name: *Zamia floridana*

Pronunciation: ZAY-mee-uh flor-rid-DAY-nuh

Common name(s): coontie

Family: *Zamiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 8: year-round

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Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: border; mass planting; accent; attracts butterflies; suitable for growing indoors

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet

Spread: 3 to 5 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral

Leaf type: even-pinnately compound

Leaf margin: revolute; serrate

Leaf shape: linear

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; usually with one stem/trunk

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

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Growing best with some shade, coontie can tolerate full sun and grows on a variety of soils as long as it is well-drained. Watering should be done with moderation, if at all, once established. But like any plant, plenty of water is needed following transplanting.

Propagation is usually difficult by seed, and growth is very slow.

Pest and Diseases

Pest problems include sooty mold, mealy bugs, and scale. Florida red scale must be controlled by regular spraying because it can be fatal to coontie. The Alata caterpillar feeds only on the coontie. It devours foliage at a rapid rate for about two weeks and then disappears. Plants look fine after new foliage appears.

No diseases are of major concern.