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# Sago Palm Care and Growing Guide



Photo Credit: Bekker24

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FREE GUIDE!

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# Learn how to plant, grow, and care for sago palms.

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

Last Updated: November 13, 2024



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Prehistoric and even exotic, sago palms conjure images of warm tropical places. With its feathery foliage, it's a popular houseplant in non-tropical zones—bringing flair, interest, and sturdiness to any room. Easy-care and slow-growing, it's also popular with beginner houseplant parents. Learn how to plant, grow,

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# About Sago Palms

Sago palms look like palm trees, but they are actually conifers and belong to an ancient family of plants called Cycads.

Dinosaurs ate sago palms, likely bigger than the ones we have today! The Jurassic period is sometimes referred to as the Age of the Cycads.

As very slow-growing plants, they put on only one new frond yearly. The leaves are deep green, quite stiff, and grow 2 to 5 feet long, with many leaflets. The leaves are attached directly to the trunk.

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Sago palm growing in a park. Credit: PD Herath

While they're tropical plants, sago palms are hardy only in USDA Zones 9 to 10, so they are most often grown as houseplants or placed outside during the summer months and brought indoors to overwinter. They are both drought-tolerant and stay evergreen all year. In the garden, plant in early spring or late fall.

## How Big Do Sago Palms Get?

Sago palms can live for decades and as long as 200 years! They grow very slowly. It may take them 50 years to grow to their full height—10 feet tall and 5 feet wide.

As houseplants, however, they may reach 2 to 3 feet after a few years. They grow very, very slowly—just a few inches annually. Keep in mind: If your children or pets eat plants, sago

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## PLANTING

Sago palms love partial sunlight and, if planted outdoors, will do best with a bit of shade in the hottest parts of the day.

Drainage is essential. If your site is less well-draining, build up a berm of sand and compost to provide the necessary drainage.

They'll do best in sandy or loamy soils with a neutral to slightly acidic pH.

## How to Plant Sago Palms

Sago palms need excellent drainage. If repotting in a new container, choose one only 2 to 3 inches wider than the nursery pot it came in. When planting several sago palms in a bed, space them 4 to 5 feet apart to give them room. While they are slow growing, they are difficult to move later on.

some moisture. Mixing potting soil, sand, perlite, and coir works well. Bagged cactus and palm soils also work and are easy to find at the big box store or garden center.

Plant your sago at the same depth as in the nursery pot. Burying them too deep can cause issues with root rot and crown rot. Be sure to get the plant upright. It's easy to plant them a bit crooked. Tamp the soil around the root ball and water it thoroughly. Mulch will help keep the weeds down, but don't let the mulch pile up around the base.

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Sago plant adds flair to any room. Credit:  
AfricaStudio

## GROWING

# Caring for Sago Palms

When growing sago palms as houseplants or overwintering them indoors, pay attention to soil moisture, as overwatering is the most common way to kill a sago palm.

- Provide a spot with bright light for at least several hours a day. Leave the dark corner of the room for your snake plant.
- Water when the top inch of soil has dried out. Use your finger to test. During the winter, watering frequency should taper off as the plant is less active.
- Keep sagos away from drafty spots like in front of an entry door.
- Sago palms love humidity. If your house runs dry in the winter, as many do, consider a small, portable humidifier and group your humidity-loving houseplants together near it.
- During spring and summer months, sago palms can be fertilized monthly or pro-



Watering sago plant indoors. Credit:  
Elena\_Gr

## Trimming Sago Palms

- Trim off only the brown fronds. Leave yellow fronds until they've browned, and the plant is done with them. It is normal for older cycad leaves to turn yellow, then brown, as the plant will store nutrients to grow newer leaves.
- However, if you see younger leaves turning yellow, this could mean that either your plant is not draining properly or it's nutrient-deficient and needs fertilizer.
- On the other hand, if sago palm yellowing occurs with new growth, this could signal a nutrient deficiency. Insects can be another factor, as these plants are well known for harboring pests like scale bugs. Newly planted sago palms that suffer from yellowing may be the result of improper planting or poor drainage.

soil moisture and keeping them weeded.

They're a stout plant that knows how to survive.

## Propagating Sago Palms

While sago palms can be grown from seed, dividing is the most common and fastest way to propagate a sago palm. These plants will grow miniature versions of themselves, called pups, at their base. Once a pup is properly established, it can be separated from the mother plant and repotted. Unfortunately, you may have to wait a while before pups appear. The plants must be mature, which could take several years or more.

Sago palms have a tap root, even the pups. While the pups may still root if their taproot is severed, you'll have better and faster results if you manage to keep it intact.

## ADVERTISEMENT

- Identify one or more pups growing near the base of the mother plant. They'll look like miniature versions and likely have a frond or two coming off them.
- Remove mulch and soil around the pup to make it easier to see.
- Work down between the pup and the mother plant using a sharp garden spade. They're attached, and you'll need to cut through to separate them. Try to do it in one swoop for a clean break.
- Cautiously keep working the spade straight down around the pup, prying and loosening. Remember the tap root. When the pup appears loosened, lift and wiggle it free.
- Allow the pup to sit out in a shady spot and let the severed area cure for a few days to reduce the chance of rot later.
- Use a pot with several drain holes and fill it with a rapidly draining soil mixture. Cactus or palm mix is ideal, but you can mix potting soil, sand, perlite, and coco coir—about 3 parts potting mix to 1 part other ingredients.
- Plant the pups, leaving about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the base out of the soil. Planting too deep can cause rot issues.

into partial sun.

Be patient; sago palms can take a year to root and start putting out new growth!

## Types

There are several types of sago palms.

- **King sago palm** (*Cycas revoluta*) is the most commonly cultivated and grown of the sago palms. Arching fronds may be more than 3 feet long and form a rosette similar to a Boston fern. Shorter and more shrub-like, these are fantastic container plants in large urns.
- **Queen sago** (*Cycas rumphii*) is more tree-shaped with a single trunk that may eventually reach 20-30 feet tall. Individual fronds can be up to 8 feet long. They make an attractive, if slow-growing, growing shrub border.
- **Queen sago** palm (*Cycas circinalis*) is a short tree. It grows to a height of about 10 feet with a single trunk and a crown of leaves, looking more like a traditional, if shorter, palm tree.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

Sago palms don't have many problems with pests and disease; however, when grown indoors, they can have issues like other houseplants.

- [See how to control scale insects](#) in houseplants.
- [Learn how to control spider mites.](#)

## WIT AND WISDOM

- The San Diego Zoo maintains an [extensive collection of rare cycads](#), totaling

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture. [Read More from Andy Wilcox](#)

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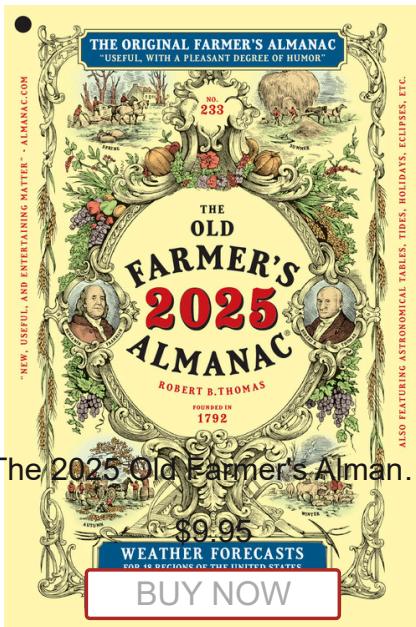
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Proceed with caution if you have children and/or pets. All parts of the Sago palm are poisonous.

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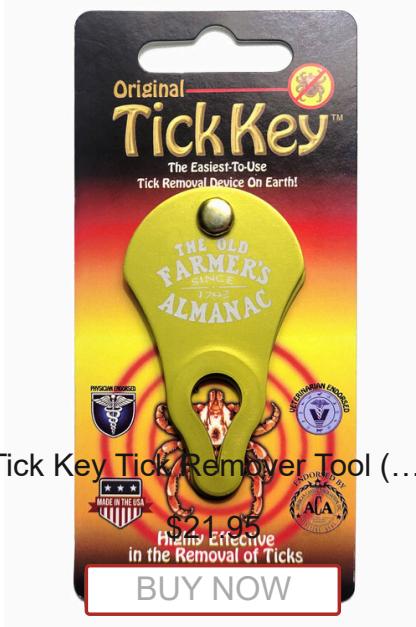


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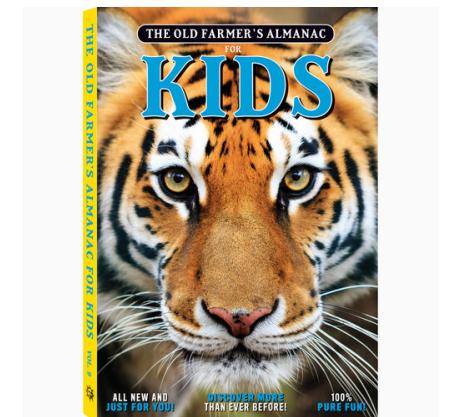


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