

Scientific Name:

Stangeria eriopus

Common Names:

Natal grass cycad, Stanger's cycad (Eng); bobbejaankos (Afr); Imfingo (isiZulu); Umfingwani (isiXhosa)

Conservation Status

DD	LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW
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Vulnerable (VU)

Plant Type / Size Slow-growing, perennial shrub, less than 2 m tall

Such a unique looking cycad that it was originally thought to be a type of fern. Two apparent forms, one growing in forested areas and a smaller, hardier one in open grasslands – which can survive annual grass fires and drought. Stems are completely subterranean and the root is carrot-shaped. Young leaves have a fern-like feature of being rolled up at the tip (circinate). Leaf margins can be smooth, serrated, or lobed, and they can vary even on the same plant. Female cones are ovoid/egg shaped and can yield as many as 100 seeds. Male cones are elongated and narrow. Mature cones give off a fruity odor.

Cone Season

Produced throughout the year

 Spring	 Summer	 Autumn	 Winter
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Photo credit: Alison Young

Drought Tolerance

Low	Moderate	High
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Grassland form: fairly tolerant.

Gardening Skill Needed

Low	Moderate	High	Expert
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Low maintenance once established.

Pot Plant Potential

Poor	Moderate	Good	Excellent
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If planted in a large container to allow for root development.

Water Regime

Requires consistently moist soil. Water regularly but do not overwater.



Soil Type

Can grow in granite soils but prefer well-drained sandy, acidic soils, rich in organic material. A mulch layer helps keep the tuber covered and prevent the soil from drying out.

Ideal Position

For more luxuriant foliage grow in shaded areas in well-drained soil.
Natural: grows in full sun in short grasslands, in light and dense shade in forests



How to Propagate

Seeds: Viable seeds are produced by planting both male and female plants in a group (wind / insect pollination). Harvest seeds when the female cone begins to disintegrate. Place seeds in water for a day and then remove all of the soft tissue. Store clean seeds in a cool, dry place until the following spring. Press seeds into clean river sand (preferably 25-28°C) - so they are level with the sand, with the long axis parallel to the surface. Never cover the seed with sand. Cover with a glass to keep air humid around the seed. Keep in a shaded area. Water every day. Germination: 2 months. Repot in well-drained growing medium + lime at 10 months or when the leaves appear. Water seedlings sparingly until they show substantial growth.

Cutting: Break an entire leaf off the stem – ensuring a portion of stem is attached to the base of the cutting. Trim leaf to prevent loss of moisture. Treat base of cutting with a rooting hormone and place in clean, coarse sand (depth: 8 cm). Root development begins: 10-14 weeks. 18 months a well-developed root system is established.

Maintenance Tips

Add mature compost and bone meal in the hole before planting. Regularly feed to maintain a healthy plant. Use a gentle irrigation system/technique to avoid damaging the beautiful leaves.

Uses

Medicinal: Xhosa and Zulu people use this species extensively for medicinal purposes. The root is used as a purgative, in the treatment of headaches and is applied to damaged teats of cattle. The plant is also used as protection against lightning.



Ornamental: Ideal for shaded gardens.



Ecology

Cones are insect-pollinated. Fruit odor attracts beetle pollinators.

