

Plant of the Month

April
2019

Common Name: Pineapple Zamia
Scientific Name: *Lepidozamia peroffskyana*
Regel
Family: Zamiaceae
Etymology
Genus epithet: Greek *lepidos* - scaly and *zamia* - a type of cycad.
Species: Count Peroffsky, a patron of St Petersburg Botanic Garden

Distribution

Endemic to the east coast of Australia, in a 700 km coastal strip from northern NSW to south east Queensland.

Native Habitat

Wet sclerophyll forests on protected slopes, gullies, rainforest margins and coastal forests on stabilised sand dunes and sand hills. It grows from sea level to about 1000 m.

Description

Grows to a maximum height of seven metres. Large, arching dark green, palm like pinnate leaves 2-3 m long. New leaves are soft, brown and tomentose. Plants form a large trunk-like caudex with age that may be branched or unbranched.

Reproduction

Dioecious, separate plants bear either male or female cones. Male cones are 40–60 cm long, 10–12 cm diameter. Female cones 50–80 cm long, 25–30 cm diameter. Poisonous seeds are 5–6 cm long, 3–3.5 cm diameter, with 1 or 3 seeds in each sporophyll and the outer fleshy layer is red when ripe.

Location in Garden

Palm Grove and Australian Rainforest Garden.
To find additional locations and other plants in our garden, use our new Garden Explorer plant finder at:
<https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/Visit/Garden-Explorer>

Information

One of two species in the genus both trunk forming and endemic to Australia. The related *Lepidozamia hopei* is the tallest cycad in Australia growing to a height of 20 metres.

Male and female plants of *Lepidozamia peroffskyana* are only easily differentiated when they produce their distinctive cones. Male cones are more slender than female and open in an unusual spiral pattern. As male cones open they attract swarms of Tranes weevils. These weevils breed and lay their larvae in the male cones. The cones become food for the weevils and this leads to the rapid destruction of the male cones. The weevils also visit female cones on nearby plants, perhaps attracted by smell, and as they do so they transfer pollen from the male plants to the female plants. This results in pollination and the development of red seeds, that drop to the ground as the larger female cone opens.

Seeds are poisonous but are eaten by kangaroos, possums and rats. Aboriginal cultural groups in northern NSW and south east Queensland developed ways to prepare the seed to neutralise the toxins and make them edible.

