



Stephen &amp; Kristin Pategas

## in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

### Plants Of The Past

Oh boy, do styles ever change. Colors, clothes and even words go in and out of style. While “cool”

is still used in our household, it's been decades since tough, groovy, neat or boss have been heard describing something that is terrific. In the world of planting design, the plants are the fashion markers. Why do some plants come and go while many stick around forever?

Availability is a major factor. When nurseries stop growing the plant – it fades away. There are many reasons for production to cease. In the most extreme situation, a plant is banned from nursery production by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services due to the environmental harm it does in natural areas. Notable examples include the Chinese tallow/popcorn tree and Brazilian pepper/Florida holly. Other invasive plants while still legal to grow have zero or minimal demand from the public due to their invasiveness and high maintenance. This includes the camphor tree and sword fern which are both scourges in the landscape. Most gardeners are not aware Mexican petunia is also invasive.

Diseases and insect pests have taken their toll on a number of favorite plants. Sago palms were unusual specimens at one time then became commonly available (at one nursery that was all they sold) which arguably contributed to their demise. The inadvertent introduction of the Asian cycad scale into Miami was the start of the death knell for this popular plant. Then hurricanes pushed this plant pest northward and with sago palms gracing at least one garden in every

block the pest easily leapfrogged throughout Central Florida. Fortunately the Chestnut dioon/*Dioon edule* is a tropical looking cold-hardy look-alike that does not get the scale.

When we moved to Florida in 1982 a common hedge plant was the red tip photinia. The new growth is reddish and when backlit by sunlight it is stunning. Over time a fungus leaf spot took its toll and these once striking hedges thinned out requiring regular chemical sprays to stay healthy. Fortunately about that time a Florida native plant that functions well as a hedge was just becoming available. Yellow anise/*Illicium parvifolium* with a licorice scent to its bruised leaves successfully replaced many of those failing red tips.

New plants that catch our eye and fancy can muscle their way into the nursery trade and our garden designs. When we helped elect bulbine to the Florida Garden Select program in 2006, who would have guessed this colorful low water use succulent

would become such a favorite. Shishigashira camellia joined the program in 2004 with limited availability, but this low growing rose-red flowering camellia is now readily available. See more Florida Garden Select plants at <http://www.floridagardening.org>.

Keep your eyes open and you are sure to see some cool stylish plants gracing garden centers, area gardens, or these pages.

At left, *Dioon edule*, a cycad to substitute for the sago.

Above, *Bulbine frutescens* 'Hallmark.'Above, *Camellia hiemalis* 'Shishigashira.' Below, Sago palm infested with scale.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas, Hortus, Oasis.