



FYN Garden Q & A Series

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Yards & Neighborhoods



FYN Topic: Coontie Sudden Death Syndrome

Question: I thought the native coontie would be easy to grow. My perfectly healthy plant suddenly collapsed and died after just a few years in the ground. As the leaves dieback, bright orange seeds are falling from the now collapsing center cone. Is this normal? Why me in Cape Coral?

Answer: This phenomena is common enough that diagnosticians have dubbed it with a name CSDS, Coontie Sudden Death Syndrome (CSDS). CSDS may neither be fatal nor necessarily real. But probably something caused by environmental or cultural factors and not induced by a pathogen or disease. However like most 'conditions' in the plant world, environmental stress is likely: foot traffic damaging roots, planting in low spot that's too wet, originally planted too deep or insects are damaging the leaves like scale or mealy bugs,. Is the coontie dead or just resting? Dig down with your hands and see if the main stem (or caudex) is hard. If it is totally mushy or rotted your coontie is dead. If the stem is firm, it is just fine. Fertilize with worm castings in March and April prior to a good flush of new growth in May. Turn off the sprinklers and let mother nature water it. Overwatering a weakened coontie with CSDS could make the condition terminal by Spring.



Coontie (Photo: Dan Culbert, UF/IFAS)

Useful Links

<http://www.floridayards.org>
<http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>
<http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>

Thomas Becker is an extension agent for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program at the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the Horticulture Help Desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by emailing Extgardener@leegov.com. Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>

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