



# Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

*Affiliate of the International Palm Society*

Monthly Update

June 2014

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

June 2014

There will be **NO MEETING** in June due to member participation in the 2014 International Palm Society Biennial.

### **Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society 2013 Officers & Executive Committee**

Tom Ramiccio, President (561) 386-7812  
Don Bittel, Vice President (772) 521-4601  
Ruth Lynch, Secretary (561) 312-5046  
Ingrid Dewey, Treasurer (561) 3300  
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Terry Lynch, Director (561) 582-7378  
Tom Whisler, Director (561) 627-8328  
Betty Ahlborn, Immediate Past President  
(561) 798-4562

#### Appointees

Charlie Beck, Librarian  
Ruth Lynch, Refreshment Chairman  
Brenda Beck, Web Master and Historian

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All photographs in this issue were provided by Charlie Beck.

## MAY THANK YOU

**Food:** Debbie Crawford, Janice DiPaola, Ruth Lynch, Tom Ramiccio, Chris Tiner, Gerard Valentine, Tom & Mary Whisler

**Plant Donations:** Charlie Beck, Dale Holton, Chip Jones

**Door:** Betty Ahlborn

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VISIT US AT [www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com](http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com)

## FEATURED THIS MONTH: *Arenga australasica*

by Charlie Beck

*Arenga australasica* is a medium to large sized, clumping palm native to northern Australia. *A. australasica* was originally thought to be widely distributed throughout the Top End of Australia. In 2011, Dowe and Jones divided *A. australasica* into two species: *A. australasica* which is restricted to Cape York, Queensland at Latitude 10.7 degrees S and *A. microphylla* which is widely distributed across Northern Territory and also occurs in Queensland and New Guinea. *A. microphylla* has a distribution ranging to Latitude 18 degrees S. This division is so recent, I could not find any reference to *A. microphylla* other than in a Northern Territory Government Department of Land Resource Management document. Kew's checklist of valid names does not include *A. microphylla* at this time. Considering that *A. australasica* is restricted to the most northern tip of Queensland, Australia, I'll bet that all *A. australasica* that are in cultivation today are actually *A. microphylla*. Until Kew lists *A. microphylla* as a valid name, I'll call it *A. australasica* in this article.

*A. australasica* is native to coastal lowland rainforest ranging from sea level to an elevation of 700 feet. In habitat, individual stems can reach heights of 45 to 60' but maximum height in South Florida is typically 10-20 feet. *A. australasica* is monocarpic which means that individual stems die after flowering and seed production is completed. It does take many years of growth before flowering commences. This monocarpic habit limits the ultimate height of the stems. Inflorescences are a showy yellow color and mature seed color ranges from orange to red. Be careful handling the fruit because the fruit contains a skin irritant. In habitat leaves can grow 7 - 10' long. Leaves are dark green above and silver below. The pinnae are wide and have notched margins. The stems are covered in attractive black fiber.

Considering the native range of this tropical palm (10.7 to 18 degrees S latitude), it's surprising how well it grows in Palm Beach County (26.4 to 27 degrees N latitude). That translates to an 850 mile difference in average latitude between its native range and Palm Beach County. To put that distance in perspective, that is the distance from West Palm Beach to Washington DC. That is quite a different growing climate! Our *A. australasica* were planted in

2001 and came through the record cold winters of 2009 and 2010 with no cold damage. Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) has many *A. australasica* which survived the 1989 freeze with a recorded low temperature of 27 degrees Fahrenheit.

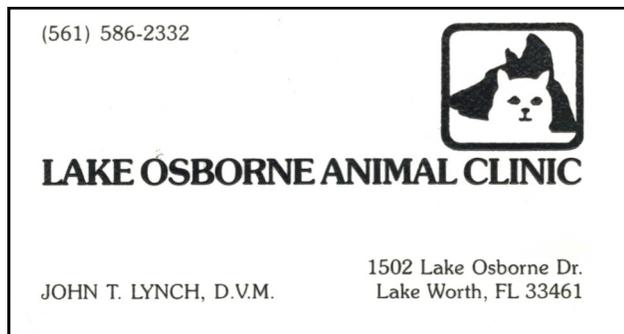
Both of our plants are flowering and fruiting after 13 years of growth. The tallest flowering stem is only 15' tall, so *A. australasica* is definitely height limited due to its monocarpic habit. Stems measure 6" in diameter. Leaves measure 13' in length and the overall canopy footprint is 30 feet. Our palms are planted in shade. Sun grown plants will have shorter leaves. Unfortunately our palms are situated in areas which are difficult to photograph so I included a photo of an old FTBG palm for overall viewing.

What makes *A. australasica* my favorite *Arenga* species? It has a much more tropical look than the more common, thin leaf, *A. engleri*. It looks quite similar to *A. tremula* but has grown much faster in our garden. *A. australasica* does not take up as much real estate and is more cold hardy than *A. undulatifolia*. *A. australasica* grows equally well in areas prone to flooding as it does in areas with good drainage. The contrast between the dark green upper leaf surface with the silver underside is quite attractive. It grows equally well in full sun or shade. Although the footprint is large due to its clumping habit, size can be controlled by thinning stems. Overall height is well suited for landscaping around one story homes. Hurricane resistance should also be very good. With recommended fertilizing, I've never noticed any nutritional deficiencies.



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The business card features a background of palm leaves and a sunset scene with a heron standing on a small island in the water. The text is in a mix of orange and black fonts.



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LAKE OSBORNE ANIMAL CLINIC

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"By appointment only"

The business card has a white background with a black border. It features illustrations of a palm tree and a cycad. The text is in a bold, black font.

*Arenga australasica*



13 year old *Arenga australasica* in the Beck garden.



*Arenga australasica* inflorescence and black fiber on stem in the Beck garden



Turk & Sue Rowlands lending scale to *Arenga australasica* during at FTBG



*Arenga australasica* immature fruit in the Beck garden

**Palms with “knockout” Flowers**



## Random Planting Advice

by Charlie Beck

I've learned the hard way that underplanting palms in soil with high root competition is seldom successful. It really depends on what canopy trees you are underplanting. If you can dig a hole without cutting through many roots then you will probably be successful, but if it's hard to drive the shovel then a raised bed might improve your success. Mounding the soil to the height of the potted plant or higher, allows the newly planted palm to establish without heavy competition from the canopy tree. Keep in mind that the canopy tree roots will also expand into the mound but I've had a much higher rate of success with this method. Keep mounds well away from base of the canopy tree.

What kind of soil should you use for the mound? Garden centers sell so called "top soil" in bags and in bulk. I have found that these soils are highly organic. They contain compost, muck and other organic ingredients. They offer good drainage while they are fresh but what happens when the organic ingredients break down? I know muck lasts a long time when buried in the ground and it's deprived of oxygen. I also know that it breaks down quite rapidly in pots or when brought to the surface in an oxygen rich environment. I question how long these soils will hold their light structure. Most large garden centers which offer bulk rock and soils also offer what they call "fill." This is typically soil dug out when constructing swimming pools. It can be quite variable in quality and uniformity. Most often this "fill" is mostly sand with some rock and shell. Although it doesn't have much organic ingredient, it is inert and it will not break down with time. Actually this is the same soil that your palm root will end up growing into as it matures. "Fill" also is less expensive than "top soil."

What is the best canopy tree? There are many trees and palms which provide good canopy. If you are using palms to create canopy for shade loving underplanting, I recommend spacing the palms so that the mature frond tip touches the stem of the adjacent canopy palm. I found out through experience that spacing palms for can-

opy farther apart does not provide enough shade for understory plants. If you use palms to create canopy use fast growing palms like *Veitchia* or *Carpentaria*. Any fast growing palm with relatively light fronds will suffice. Don't use palms with heavy fronds like *Roystonea* or *Cocos*. Plant shade loving palms that will not outgrow the canopy trees.

If you choose a dicot tree for canopy, consider our native Live Oak. Although root competition is high, there are other advantages to using this tree. Live Oaks do grow fast when irrigated and fertilized. Even though these native trees do not require any supplemental irrigation or fertilizer, I'm sure you will be babying your understory palms. The Live Oak can be trimmed up to provide high canopy. I do recommend mounding the soil for your newly planted palms under Live Oaks. Another reason to plant Live Oak as a canopy tree is that it provides excellent habitat for our native wildlife. In a study printed in "Bringing Nature Home" by Douglas W. Tallamy, oak trees scored the best for supporting wildlife. There are many butterflies and moths which depend on oaks as host trees. The caterpillars which feed on the leaves are critically important to nesting birds to feed their young. When migrating birds pass through our area, they depend on eating insects which they find on the Live Oak. If you enjoy birds you should definitely add a Live Oak to your garden. Hummingbirds are drawn to these trees when in bloom. I'm not sure if it's the nectar or the pollen which attracts them but they do frequent this tree. Of course we all know how oak acorns feed a wide array of native wildlife.

Live Oak is a very durable and desirable native tree. Live Oaks have a wide spread and they seem to let in just the right amount of light. In the winter they drop some of their leaves which allows more light to reach your underplantings when the sunlight is less direct. Orchids love growing in the shade of these trees.

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### Possible Aid in Treating Bud Rot

by Charlie Beck

Long time Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society member, Bob Grimm, reported a novel approach to treating palm bud rot. Bob stated that placing a handful of pennies on an ailing *Coccothrinax borhidiana* bud might have helped in the palm's recovery. We know that copper spray has long been recommended for treating palm bud rot. A handful of pennies might be helpful.

### Thank You Brenda LaPlatte

by Charlie & Brenda Beck

Brenda and I would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to Brenda LaPlatte, our daughter, for volunteering her expertise and time to ensure the Palm Society newsletter could be sent out over the last several months during Brenda's absence. In addition, she kept our website updated with current information and maintained our email mailing list.

Thank you, Brenda, for graciously and happily stepping up to the plate.

## Palms with “knockout” Flowers



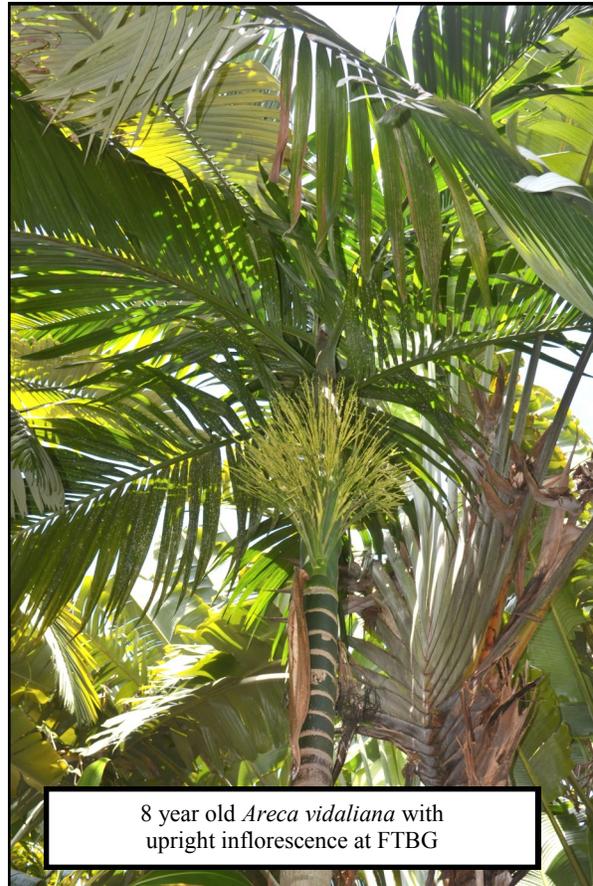
46 year old *Borassodendron machadonis*  
in full bloom at FTBG



*Chamaedorea adscendens* male inflorescence  
in the Beck garden.



*Dictyosperma album*  
in the Beck garden



8 year old *Areca vidaliana* with  
upright inflorescence at FTBG