



Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

Affiliate of the International Palm Society

Monthly Update

September 2014

UPCOMING MEETINGS

September 3, 2014
7:30 p.m.
at Mounts Botanical Garden

Speaker: Chip Jones
Subject: The Letter "C" for Palms

August Featured Auction Plants:

Verschaffeltia splendida
(Cold sensitive - take indoors below 40° F)

Beccariophoenix fenestralis

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Charlie Beck, Librarian
Ruth Lynch, Refreshment Chairman
Brenda Beck, Historian
Brenda LaPlatte, Webmaster

AUGUST "THANK YOU"

Food: Cathy & Lew Burger, Doyle Cochran,
Robin Crowford, Janice DiPaola, Ruth Lynch, Tom
Ramiccio, Kathy & Rod Silverio

Plants: Marshall Dewey, Mike Harris, Mick Pepler

Door: Janice DiPaola

All photographs in this issue were provided
by Charlie Beck unless otherwise specified.

The Holton Nursery pictures on page 3 were provided by Dale Holton.

Opinions expressed and products or recommendations published in this newsletter may not be the opinions or recommendations of the Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society or its board of directors.

VISIT US AT www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com

FEATURED THIS MONTH: *Acrocomia crispa*

by Charlie Beck

Acrocomia crispa is a monoecious, medium size, pinnate palm native to Cuba. It grows at low elevations on calcareous soil. It was formally known as *Gastrococos crispa* but was renamed *Acrocomia* in 2008. Like all *Acrocomia* species this palm is very spiny. Leaves and stems are covered with long sharp spines. Leaves are plumose and measure about 8' long. Leaves are dark green above and silver or gray below. Stems can reach 60' in height and typically swell midway along its length. This conspicuous swelling is why the common name is the Cuban Belly Palm. Don't confuse this with the other Cuban Belly Palm, *Colpothrinax wrightii* which has palmate leaves. *A. crispa* produces showy pendulous clusters of round, orange fruit.

On my recent trip to Cuba I saw many of these impressive palms. Some of these palms had stems which were comically swollen. They were really an impressive sight. Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) is another place to see mature *A. crispa* with swollen stems. Fairchild's original plantings were in 1966 so you can see well grown 48 year old specimens.

My first sightings of *A. crispa* were at FTBG. They were high on my list of "must have" palms. Our typical Palm Beach County, sugar sand, soil is quite different than Fairchild's limestone substrate but it did not stop me from planting this palm in our garden. I understood that this palm enjoyed moist soil so I felt it would be happy growing in our irrigated garden which occasionally floods after heavy downpours. Well, I lost the first 3 or 4 palms that I planted. I still don't know why those palms died but the last palm that I planted from a 3 gallon pot in 2005 has thrived. In 9 years it has grown 17' of stem, measured to the bottom of the leaf bases. I'm still not sure why this palm survived and the others did not. Maybe the location in the garden made the difference or maybe it had a genetic disposition for growing in sand. I was not aware of Boron deficiency back then so maybe that was the cause of failure. In any case if you are successful with this palm expect rapid growth when regularly irrigated and fertilized. Some of the reference books recommend planting this palm in full sun from an early age. My successful planting was in partial shade of a native, lancewood tree which quickly became full shade as the lancewood grew. The palm eventually grew right through the tree canopy. The palm is developing a belly in its stem but view of it is blocked in the photo.

Dale Holton has three *A. crispa* growing at his Loxahatchee nursery. See photos on page 3. The tallest palm is estimated to be 15-20 years old. The other two smaller palms are 10 years old. From the photos of these palms you can see quite a variation of growth rates. These three palms are all growing in marl soil which has a tendency to hold moisture and nutrients much better than sugar sand. What amazes me is that Dale has never irrigated or fertilized these palms and they look very healthy. Dale said that the tallest palm survived three hurricanes without damage.

If you want to grow a Cuban Belly Palm then *A. crispa* is the easier one to grow. This palm displays a medium sized canopy of self cleaning, plumose leaves. The falling leaves are light and they will not damage underplantings. The spines on the stem and leaves add interest but the true attraction of this palm is the swollen stem. I hope you give it a try in your garden.



Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society
presents its Annual Fall
Palm & Cycad Sale
Saturday, October 11, 9am to 4pm
Sunday, October 12, 9am to 3pm
Over 500 species of
Palms & Cycads in all shapes and sizes.
PLUS: A limited supply of top-rated fertilizer,
Palm and Cycad reference books, T-shirts
AND FREE KNOWLEDGEABLE ADVICE
NO ADMISSION CHARGE
DONT MISS IT!

AT MOUNTS BOTANICAL GARDEN



531 N. Military Trail • West Palm Beach

Acrocomia crisper in Palm Beach County



15-20 year old at Holton Nursery



10 year old at Holton Nursery



10 year old at Holton Nursery



9 year old at Beck garden

Acrocomia crisper in Cuba



Two New Loppers

by Charlie Beck

I recently purchased two new loppers. Each lopper advertised a feature which would ease specific tasks in the garden. One had a whopping 3" cutting capacity and the other had a 3x mechanical advantage without the typical compound linkage. With more than 1000 palms planted in our garden, we have our share of fallen and trimmed fronds. Rather than dragging these fronds to the curb for pickup, I cut up the fronds to use as mulch. Ultimately these fronds break down like any other mulch and enrich the soil with organic compost. I can spend several hours each week cutting fronds, so finding a lopper with a larger cutting capacity or one with a durable mechanical advantage would save a lot of effort. I describe those two new loppers below.

The Corona WL 6490 lopper with 37" long hickory handles boasted a full 3" cutting capacity. This extra capacity allows me to cut through large palm fronds with a single cut. *Bismarckia* and *Cocos* petioles are no match for these super duty loppers. As with all Corona products, these are heavy duty and are high quality. Corona uses a forged hook and a large resharpenable blade. All repair parts are available at Corona's website. These loppers have a single pivot point so they rely on the long handles for mechanical advantage. The wooden handles have adequate strength to cut through large fronds. These loppers are noticeably heavier than ones with aluminum handles. Carrying them around for hours at a time does take additional effort. A nice feature of this model is the spring loaded shock stop bumper. It seems more durable than a rubber bumper which requires regular replacement. Do not expect to cut through 3" diameter hardwood branches with these loppers. There is not enough leverage with the single pivot

mechanism and the 37" handles. It's fine for cutting through palm fronds though. When these loppers are opened the handles are widely spread. This requires a lot of clearance for the handles when maneuvering in tight situations. The wide spread handles also make these loppers less convenient to carry around the garden. These loppers are competitively priced when com-



Corona Lopper

Handle spread grasping 1.8" bamboo



Fiskars Lopper


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pared to other professional quality products. Because of their large cutting capacity, they have become my pruner of choice for cutting palm fronds.

The Fiskars 32" PowerGear lopper claimed a 3x mechanical advantage due its PowerGear design. The cutting capacity is 2 inches. The mechanical advantage of this lopper is not overstated. The gear mechanism does deliver extra cutting power. The mechanical advantage reduces the effort required to cut small palm petioles or woody branches but their use is limited due to its 2" maximum cutting capacity. Another disadvantage is that the handles must be widely spread to open the cutting jaws. This requires quite a bit of clearance around the branch you want to cut. Sometimes you don't have the handle clearance you need when you are pruning in tight areas. The PowerGear design is a great improvement over other compound action loppers that I have used in the past. The gear mechanism is simple and I expect it will be quite durable. The handles are hollow aluminum which make these loppers very light to carry. The handles close enough to allow easy one handed carrying around the garden. These are not professional quality loppers. Long term durability is unknown. They are sold at box hardware stores and are quite inexpensive. Replacement blades are available on Fiskars' website. This lopper has become my lopper of choice when pruning woody branches and small palm fronds.

In the March 2011 Newsletter I reviewed four additional loppers. Two of those loppers, the Felco Model 22 and the Fred Marvin "Garden of Eden" models are still highly recommended. Our website now contains an indexed list and full text of all Newsletters dating back to January 2009. It also has a site search feature which allows you to quickly find past subjects. If you are considering buying loppers, I encourage you to visit our website for this article at the address listed below:

http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com/newsletter/News_2011_03.pdf



Corona WS6490 Forged
Super Duty Bypass Lopper
Retail \$166.67 Discount \$112.33
Cut Capacity 3 inches
Length 37 inches
Weight 5.2 pounds

Fiskars PowerGear
Bypass Lopper (8154)
Retail \$47.99 Discount \$45.44
Cut Capacity 2 inches
Length 32 inches
Weight 2.8 pounds

***Beccariophoenix* Update** by Charlie Beck

A new species of *Beccariophoenix* has been recently described by John Dransfield and Mijoro Rakotoarinivo. It was reported in the June 2014 issue of Palms – Journal of the International Palm Society. This species is new in name only. Actually, this palm was widely distributed in the 1990s and sold as *Beccariophoenix madagascariensis*.

Beccariophoenix fenestralis is the new name for the palm that many of us have growing in our gardens. This is the palm which has broad seedling leaflets with conspicuous windows. The leaflet windows do not persist in mature leaves. *B. fenestralis* is a vigorous palm which thrives in our sandy soil. There are only two mature plants known in habitat. One plant is beside a road and this plant has supplied all of the seeds which were distributed worldwide. *B. fenestralis* is a low elevation palm found below 525 feet altitude.

B. alfredii and *B. madagascariensis* are the other two species of *Beccariophoenix*. Both of these palms have thin seedling leaflets with inconspicuous windows or no windows at all. Both of these palms grow at higher altitudes. *B. alfredii* is a vigorous grower but the true *B. madagascariensis* is very slow growing.

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