



# Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

*Affiliate of the International Palm Society*

Monthly Update

August 2017

## JULY "THANK YOU"

- Door: Lew Burger & Tom Ramiccio
- Food: Cathy Burger, Susan Cioci, Ingrid Dewey, Steve Garland, Janet James, Ruth & Terry Lynch, Robert Miller, Ed Napoli, Tom & Carol Ramiccio
- Plants: Jerry Behen, Charlie Beck, Steve Garland
- Auction: Don Bittel & Terry Lynch

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(561) 386-7812
- Don Bittel, Vice President (772) 521-4601
- Elise Moloney, Secretary (561) 312-4100
- Janice DiPaola, Membership (561) 951-0734
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- Charlie Beck, Director, Editor & Librarian  
(561) 963-5511
- Steve Garland, Director (561) 478-0120
- Terry Lynch, Director & Events Chair (561) 582-7378
- Richard Murray, Director (561) 506-6315
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(561) 798-4562

### Appointees

- Brenda Beck, Historian  
Brenda LaPlatte, Webmaster  
Ruth Lynch, Refreshment Chair

## UPCOMING MEETING

August 2, 2017

**Early Meeting Time: 7:00 p.m.**

At Mounts Botanical Garden

**Speaker:** Joel Crippen

**Subject:** Tour of Mount's Garden Exhibit,  
"Windows on the Floating World"

***PLEASE DO NOT BRING ANY  
REFRESHMENTS THIS MONTH!***

## VISIT US AT

[www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com](http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com)

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

**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.**

**FEATURED THIS MONTH: *Aiphanes minima***  
by Charlie Beck

*Aiphanes minima* is a solitary, medium size, pinnate palm. Eight inch diameter stems can grow 50' tall in habitat, but would take decades of growth to reach half that height in Palm Beach County. *A. minima* is native to the Caribbean Islands. Its distribution ranges from Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico in the north to Grenada in the south. Previously, this palm had distinct species names on many of islands. *A. acanthophylla*, *A. vincentiana*, *A. luciana*, and *A. erosa* were all lumped into *Aiphanes minima*.

Native habitat varies widely throughout its range. It can be found on dry limestone soil at high elevations or in wet locations at low elevations in volcanic soil. It grows in full sun or in heavy shade. It's quite an adaptable palm. Habitat, annual rainfall ranges between 40 and 80", which is similar to what we receive in Palm Beach County.

*Aiphanes minima* has an exotic appearance which makes it stand out in the palm garden. The stems are covered in long, flat, jet black spines. Even the leaves are spiny on both sides. The fronds are bright, emerald green and have wide, regularly arranged leaflets held in a single plane. Fronds measure 6-8' in length. The leaf tips have a distinctive, jagged shape. *Aiphanes* is the only spiny American palm genus with jagged leaf tips, except for a single species of *Bactris*.

Being monocious, a single palm can produce fruit. Ripe fruit is bright red. Seeds readily germinate but not to the extent of being weedy. Fronds are self-cleaning and are light enough to fall without damaging under plantings.

We have ten *A. minima* planted in our garden. All but one specimen were purchased with species names other than *Aiphanes minima*. Other than the former *A. vincentiana* being a smaller scale in all respects, the other palms look similar. We planted 6 specimens in a grouping which formed a mini-canopy that is particularly attractive to gaze upon.

Our oldest specimens are 23 years old. Those stems measure 17' tall. Twelve year old specimens are 11' tall, so growth does slow as the palm ages. This is what makes them suitable for planting on a standard sized lot with a one story house. They don't take up much space and they don't grow too tall. The only warning is don't ever mistakenly grab the spiny stem. The spines will penetrate even, leather gloves.

With recommended fertilization and regular irrigation, *A. minima* has been trouble free in our garden. I've never noticed a nutritional deficiency. Periodic inundation after repeated heavy rain hasn't caused a problem either. All of our *A. minima* survived the record cold winters of 2009 & 2010, but they did resent the repeated low temperatures. With recent warming trends *A. minima* should be fine when planted in eastern Palm Beach County.

Spiny stems and emerald green fronds with wide jagged leaf tips make this a very distinctive palm. Its manageable scale is also great feature. I highly recommend this beautiful palm for your palm collection.

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**Village Marina**  
396 Torpey Road  
Fort Pierce, Florida. 34946  
*Wes Taylor*  
Office 772-464-4391 Cell 772-519-1297

(561) 586-2332



**LAKE OSBORNE ANIMAL CLINIC**

JOHN T. LYNCH, D.V.M.      1502 Lake Osborne Dr.  
Lake Worth, FL 33461

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*Aiphanes minima* in the Beck Garden  
12 year old single specimen (left above)  
12 year old grouping (upper right & lower left)  
Inflorescence with red fruit (lower middle)  
Seedling with spiny leaflets (lower right)



*Cyrtostachys renda* planted in acidic soil in sunken horse trough in Beck Garden



*Cyrtostachys renda*- colorful stem and crownshaft



*Cyrtostachys renda* planted in recessed bed in native soil (same age as palm to left)



*Oncosperma tigillarum* & *Bismarckia nobilis* in Singapore, Photo courtesy of Zaki Jamil  
Originally published in IPS Newsletter- this photo might be one of the most dramatic palm photos ever.

## Growing *Cyrtostachys renda* in Palm Beach County (PBC)

by Charlie Beck

*Cyrtostachys renda*, Red Sealing Wax Palm, is a strikingly beautiful palm that is well known to most palm enthusiasts. Cherry red crownshafts atop bright green stems with distinctive tan rings make this a memorable palm. Unfortunately, this palm is very tropical in nature. It is cold sensitive and will not survive occasional low winter temperatures in PBC. Most Florida growers move these palms indoors during cold snaps, but when palms become too large to move, it becomes a problem.

My strategy for protecting *C. renda* from cold temperatures is to set out a propane heater beside the palm when temperatures are forecast in the mid 40°'s. I use the low heat setting which raises the temperature enough to protect the palm. So far this strategy has worked for me. I've been lucky that it hasn't rained on cold nights. Rain would likely extinguish the heater and cold temperatures would likely kill the palm. Although this strategy isn't foolproof, it allows me to grow these palms in the ground until we have a cold rainy night. See link for a description of the propane heater. ([http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com/newsletter/News\\_2014\\_04.pdf](http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com/newsletter/News_2014_04.pdf))

Aside from cold sensitivity, *C. renda* has another issue. It is native to peat swamps and it grows best in constantly moist soil. Many growers submerge potted specimens in a water tray. I've seen well grown specimens completely submerged in a pond. I wanted to develop a strategy for growing these palms in the ground while considering its high moisture requirement.

Several years ago I purchased three *Cyrtostachys renda*. All three potted palms were similar size. I grew two of the palms in free draining pots. The third I submerged about 2-3" into a shallow pond. The submerged palm quickly outgrew the other two. I increased the container size to a point that it became difficult to move, especially with the soil saturated with water. I secured the pot to a stake so it wouldn't blow over when we had high winds. The palm grew so tall that a single stake didn't stop it from toppling.

I needed a new strategy. I decided to transplant this palm into a 100 gallon horse trough which was sunk into the ground. These troughs are sold at local farm supply stores and also online. They are heavy duty and should last a long time. I drilled drainage holes about 6" from the top of the container. This provided some drainage at the top but trapped water at the bottom. I filled the container with a mixture of Canadian Peat, silica sand and compost. I mixed Nutricote, lime and MicroMax in with the soil as I normally do with potted plants. I also ran a water source connected to a hose end timer which runs just enough time to fill the container every day. I transplanted the

palm and waited for growth to resume. After initial transplant shock, the palm indicated that it was very happy growing in its new situation. After a few years stems measure 6' high and the overall frond height is 12'.

The remaining two *C. renda* were planted into our native sugar sand soil in a "recessed bed." I described "recessed beds" in a previous newsletter article. Link is shown below. This is a below ground level bed with extra irrigation bubblers which keep the soil moist. ([http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com/newsletter/News\\_2013\\_10.pdf](http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com/newsletter/News_2013_10.pdf))

Those two palms in sugar sand are growing well but not at the pace as the one planted in the buried horse trough. I assume that the acidic, peat soil in the container is more like this palm's native habitat. So far lack of oxygen in the trough (without drainage) has stopped the peat mix from oxidizing. We know that peat can last for years when not exposed to oxygen.

I found that old fronds drop from the *C. renda* stem before they lose their bright red color. It seems odd to discard such colorful refuse. After years, I still enjoy seeing this palm every time I walk down the driveway. I feel it was worth the extra effort, even though I might lose it if we have a cold rainy night.

P.S. I like to believe that I think outside the box but my wife, Brenda, thinks I suffer from OCPD - Obsessive Compulsive Palm Disorder.



Rubbermaid Commercial FG424288BLA Structural Foam Stock Tank, 100 Gallon

**HOLTON NURSERY**  
PALMS and CYCADS

5221 3rd Road  
Lake Worth, FL. 33467  
Phone (561) 965-6792  
Email [cycadnut@gate.net](mailto:cycadnut@gate.net)



"By appointment only"

**Palm Identification Label Wire**  
by Charlie Beck



Locally available locking wire

Have you ever considered attaching palm ID labels just like they do at Montgomery Botanical Center (MBC)? Vickie Murphy, Nursery Curator of MBC, shared her method with me. She coils wire around a length of ½” PVC pipe or any other suitable round object to form a spring with straight ends. Smaller palm stems might require smaller coils. They attach a plant ID label to the palm using the formed spring. They use aluminum wire as specified below.

- Source: HM Wire International
- Wire diameter: 0.050
- Wire type: 1100-O (soft temper)
- Quoted cost: \$54 per 1000’ coil

I have found that .041 diameter Stainless Lock Wire locally available at Harbor Freight Tools also works for this purpose and sells for approximately \$8.50 for a one pound roll (see photos).



Formed spring twist tied to palm stem

**Garden Tour Photo**



*Aiphanes minima* jagged leaf lips



Tom Whisler lending scale to a magnificent *Copernicia fallaensis* at the Don Middlebrooks Garden in Jupiter  
Photo by Mary Whisler