

GROWING *Copernicia* hybrids as seen in Cuba IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

While in Cuba, our group saw several natural *Copernicia* hybrids. Some were named long ago and some were currently unnamed crosses. There is also a question if *Copernicia curbeloi* is a valid species or a hybrid. I'll share some photos of the hybrids along with photos of their parent plants. As I mentioned in last month's newsletter, Raul Verdecia is the current expert on Cuban palms and all of these hybrids were identified by Raul.

One of the currently unnamed hybrids is a cross between *C. yarey* and *C. rigida*. This hybrid looks like a *C. rigida* with longer petioles. We didn't see many of these but you could pick them out from populations of *C. rigida* once you knew the difference. See photo on page 3 upper left. The hybrid is front and center and its parent *C. rigida* is shown in the background.

Copernicia x shaferi is a cross between *C. hospita* and *C. cowellii*. It was silver just like its parents and was sized smaller than *C. hospita*. Holton Nursery obtained a supply of these rare hybrids and Tom Whisler was fortunate to buy one before they sold out. Like all of Tom's palms, his *C. x shaferi* looks very healthy and happy in his garden. No sign of growing difficulties like that of its parent *C. cowellii* which is difficult to grow in Palm Beach County. If this hybrid becomes available in the future, buy it. It's a real beauty.

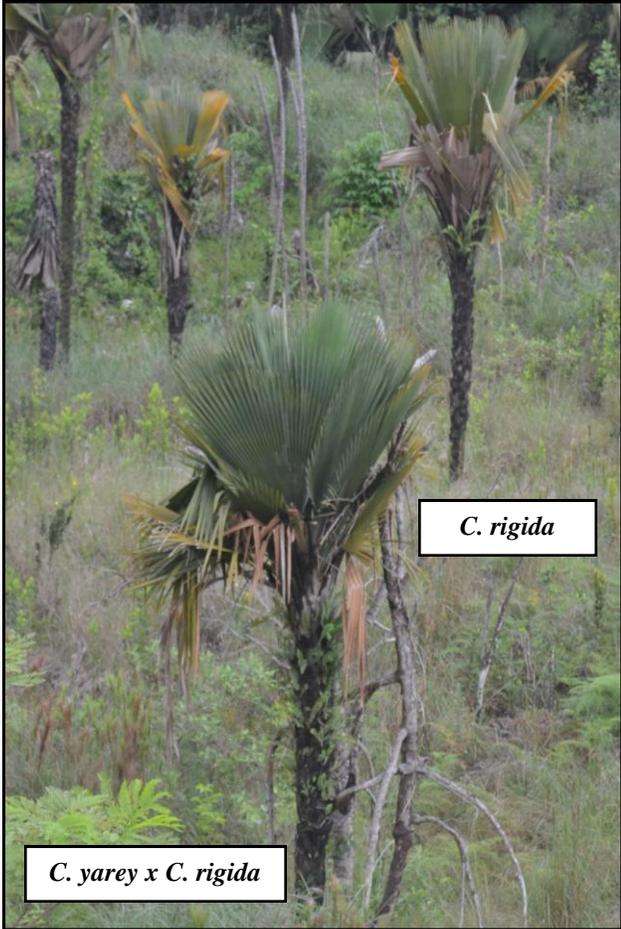
Copernicia x sueroana is a cross between *C. hospita* and *C. rigida*. The many examples we saw of this hybrid were uniformly upright with a small footprint. We planted a palm labeled as *C. x sueroana* many years ago in our garden. It has grown vigorously over the years and has a different appearance than the ones we saw in Cuba. I would readily assume that our specimen was mislabeled except our *C. x sueroana* does look like the ones pictured in the 1963 Revision of the Genus *Copernicia*.

An unnamed hybrid between *C. baileyana* and *C. rigida* is shown on pg 5. The hybrid is shown on the left while *C. rigida* is shown to the right. The hybrid has wider leaves and longer petioles than *C. rigida*. It is a handsome palm. It tempts me to cross pollinate these species once our garden plants commence flowering.

Raul Verdecia's summary of the next palm was a complete surprise to me. Raul stated that *C. curbeloi* is a hybrid between *C. yarey* and *C. baileyana*. He said that there are no isolated populations of *C. curbeloi* but they are always found growing among *C. yarey* and *C. baileyana*. We have several *C. curbeloi* growing in our garden and they are all uniform in color, scale and growth habit. If seeds were collected from a hybrid then I would expect to see offspring reverting back to either parent. All of the *C. curbeloi* that I saw in Cuba and in our garden were uniformly silver in color. *C. yarey* is a smaller, green palm. *C. baileyana* can be either silver or green but is a much larger palm. Keep in mind that DNA testing on these palms has not been completed and theories still need confirmation.

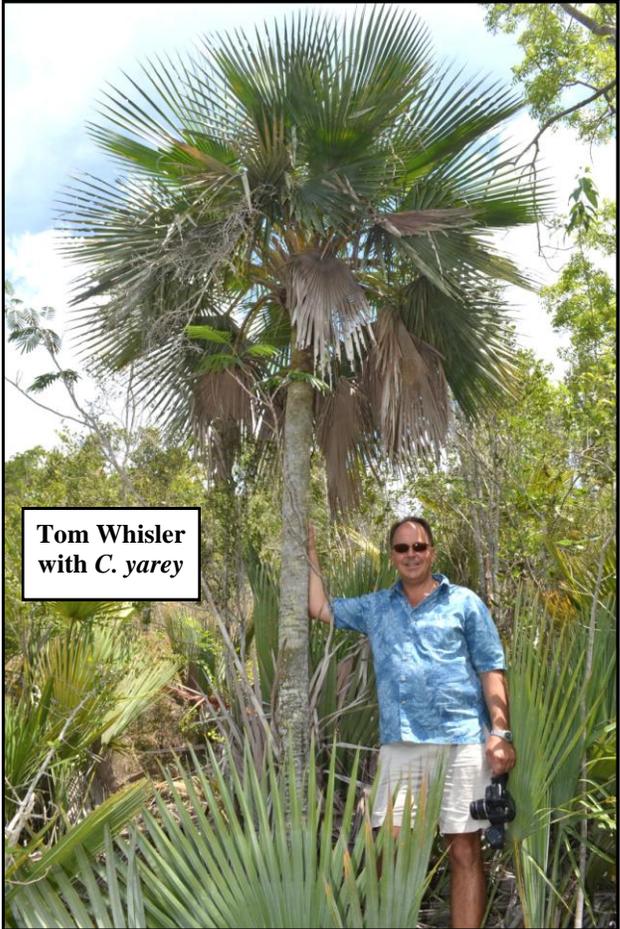
Note that *C. curbeloi* was described in the 1963 monograph, Revision of the Genus *Copernicia*. This officially is still a valid species. In the 1995 publication, Field Guide to the Palms of the Americas, *C. curbeloi* was lumped with *C. hospita*. This Field Guide was never recognized as a scientifically valid revision.

All of the *Copernicia* species and hybrids mentioned above except *C. cowellii* should be good growers in Palm Beach County. Proper naming of plants purchased in South Florida cannot be guaranteed unless seeds are collected from isolated wild populations or if seed is produced from hand pollinated verified plants. This uncertainty should not stop us from planting these magnificent palms. If the species is true, you will be rewarded with what you expect. If the palm turns out to be a hybrid, it will likely be more vigorous and be equally beautiful.



C. rigida

C. yarey x C. rigida



Tom Whisler
with *C. yarey*



Copernicia rigida





Copernicia x sueroana
(*C. hospita* x *C. rigida*)



C. rigida

C. baileyana x *C. rigida*



Copernicia hospita



Copernicia curbeloii
(? *C.baileyana* x *C. yarey* ?)



Elvis Cruz
with *C. baileyana*



Copernicia yarey