

GROWING *Cyrtostachys renda* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted 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)

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.



Rubbermaid Commercial FG424288BLA Structural Foam Stock Tank, 100 Gallon

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)

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.



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)