

GROWING
Hyophorbe verschaffeltii
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Hyophorbe verschaffeltii is a monoecious, pinnate palm native to the Mascarene Island of Rodrigues. Rodrigues is located in the Indian Ocean 1,000 miles east of Madagascar. *H. verschaffeltii* is a stout solitary palm with a thick stem relative to its 25' maximum height. The stem is usually thicker in the center than at the ends. This is why its common name is Spindle Palm. The fronds can be slightly strongly recurved. Its thick crownshaft can bulge at the base. The crownshaft can be green or bluish green or be green with vertical blue streaks. The inflorescence emerges below the crownshaft with a spathe which has a distinctive hornlike shape. The inflorescence bears attractive orange flowers on cream colored rachillae.

Hyophorbe verschaffeltii grows at low elevations in limestone based soils. This palm is critically endangered with less than 60 plants remaining in the wild. This palm is threatened by overgrazing, predation by rats and fragmentation of suitable habitat.

I always considered this palm as the poor brother to its more exotic sister *Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*, the Bottle Palm. I have since changed my mind and now consider *H. verschaffeltii* equally desirable. It shares many positive attributes including self cleaning fronds, hurricane resistance, and manageable size, but what really won me over was its beautiful inflorescence. When this palm is in full bloom and the inflorescences are backlit by the sun, it rivals all palms in beauty. In addition, its crownshaft can also be a showstopper. When it drops an old leaf, the newly exposed crownshaft can be very attractive with its streaked coloration.

I can attest that *H. verschaffeltii* is a survivor. I've seen it neglected and abused, planted at gas stations and other roadside locations with no irrigation or fertilization. Although these conditions don't produce an award winning appearance, the palms do survive and do look acceptable. *H. verschaffeltii* is more cold tolerant than *H. lagenicaulis*. Back in the historic freeze of 1989, *H. lagenicaulis* were killed all over Jupiter by the cold, but *H. verschaffeltii* had a much higher survivor rate. I'm not sure *H. verschaffeltii* would be long lived in zone 9, but it should prove cold hardy in zone 10. Even though its native latitude is 19.7 degrees south, it seems to thrive at our latitude of 26.7 degrees north.

Even though it grows in limestone soil in habitat, it grows equally well in our sandy soil in Palm Beach County. *H. verschaffeltii* looks its best when planted in full sun. It also thrives in partial shade. Periodic inundation after heavy rain doesn't seem to set it back at all. I've never had to supplement its feeding with micronutrients.

We have six *H. verschaffeltii* planted in our garden. The original three plants are 20 years old. They are planted in full sun and are in an area which floods after heavy rain. The remaining three are seventeen years old. They are planted in partial shade in an area which never floods. Both plantings have thrived. The 20 year old, sun grown plants are 17' tall and have a stem with a diameter of 13 inches. The 17 year old, partially shaded plants are 19' tall and have a stem diameter of 11 inches.

Hyophorbe verschaffeltii is not a rare palm. It is easy to find at palm sales. Even though it isn't a rare palm in cultivation, it's still a great palm to include in your garden. It has a distinctively masculine appearance with its stout stem and stiff recurved fronds. To recap, consider the following desirable attributes: lot friendly size, self cleaning fronds, hurricane resistance, cold tolerance, attractive crownshaft and inflorescences. It is also reported to be salt tolerant.



Hyophorbe verschaffeltii
blue-green crownshaft & hornlike spathe
20 years old in Beck Garden



Hyophorbe verschaffeltii
crownshaft after leaf drop
20 years old in Beck Garden



Hyophorbe verschaffeltii 42 years old
at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden



Hyophorbe verschaffeltii
WPB West of turnpike