

GROWING Choice *Pritchardia* Species IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Pritchardia is a genus containing approximately 30 species. They are medium-sized, solitary, palmate palms and are monoecious. *Pritchardia* palms are native to Hawaii and the South Pacific. Many of the *Pritchardia* species grow well in Palm Beach County. Some are cold sensitive and most are susceptible to Lethal Yellowing. We have grown many *Pritchardia* species in our garden. Although not all species are long-lived, they are rewarding to grow.

GROWING CONDITIONS IN THE BECK GARDEN FOR <i>Pritchardia</i> Species	
Location	4 miles from ocean in suburban Lantana
Soil	Sand over a layer of hardpan (pineland flatwood habitat)
Irrigation	¾ inch applied twice a week
Fertilization	4 times a year with Palm special analysis
Light	Full sun
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None
Insect Damage	None observed
Cold Hardiness	Variable
Hurricane Resistance	Fair

Pritchardia pacifica – In my opinion this is the most

beautiful medium-sized palmate palm. We have grown a dozen of these palms in our garden. Unfortunately, the 2009-2010 winters caused the rapid decline and death of all of our specimens. These record cold winters seem to occur every 20 years. We can grow this palm inbetween these extreme years. The other problem with *Pritchardia pacifica* is it is very susceptible to Lethal Yellowing. Fortunately, this palm is a rapid grower and is beautiful even at a small size. With proper irrigation and fertilization, you can grow this palm to at least 10 feet tall before it succumbs. Every palm enthusiast should include this palm in their collection. *P. pacifica* is usually available at palm sales. Tom Ramiccio has a potted specimen which survived our last two winters with no protection. Tom's home is located east of Route 1 in Lake Worth so low temperatures were moderated due to its close proximity to the ocean.

Pritchardia thurstonii - This species looks similar to *P. pacifica* but has very long inflorescences which extend beyond the leaf tips. It is native to Fiji. We have grown specimens to 15 feet tall but they died of Lethal Yellowing. We do have a specimen which survived our recent cold winters, so it appears more cold hardy than *P. pacifica*. Our six year old specimen has an overall height of six feet. Give it a try. It is usually available locally.

Pritchardia affinis – This palm is native to Hawaii. It grows well in our garden. Although damaged by the recent record cold, it is now fully recovered. This palm has a distinctive appearance unlike *P. pacifica*. Our specimen has grown to an overall height of 10 feet in eight years. This palm is available from Hawaiian palm vendors.

Pritchardia woodfordiana – This palm is endemic to the Solomon Islands. Like *P. affinis*, our specimen was damaged by the recent cold but did fully recover. In five years, our specimen has grown to an overall height of 10 feet. That growth rate is similar to what you can expect from *P. pacifica*. This species might be more of a challenge to find.

Pritchardia waialealeana – Beside *P. pacifica*, I feel this is the second most beautiful *Pritchardia*. It grows at elevations of 1,500 to 2,600 feet on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai. Its native range includes areas with extremely high rainfall – in excess of 400 inches per year. It's a larger palm than the

other *Pritchardia* species. When young, they remind me of *Kerriodoxa elegans*. I've grown them to perfection in the past but they mysteriously died. I've planted two more of these palms in 2007 and they have grown to an overall height of 5 ½ feet. They displayed less cold damage than *P. affinis* and *P. woodfordiana*. The only vendor I have found that sells these palms is Kapoho Palms in Hawaii.

Pritchardia vuylstekeana (vool-steek-ee-AH-na) – This palm is native to the Tuamotu Archipelago in French Polynesia. It grows on rocky cliffs. This palm has been reported as the most cold hardy of all of the non-Hawaiian *Pritchardia* palms. In our garden, it was least affected by our recent cold winters and it is growing at a fast rate. In eight years it has grown to an overall height of 15 feet. Don Hodel has stated that all *P. vuylstekeana* growing in Hawaii are probably *P. pacifica*. If this is true then it's a very cold hardy *P. pacifica*. This species is hard to find but is occasionally offered for sale from Hawaiian vendors.

Cathy and Lew Burger have a beautiful garden planted with many *Pritchardia* specimens. They agree that *P. pacifica* seems the most cold sensitive. None of their *P. pacifica* survived the recent cold winters. They also agree that *P. vuylstekeana* appears to be their most cold hardy *Pritchardia*. *Pritchardia aylmer-robinsonii*, *P. thurstonii*, and *P. hillebrandii* are all fully recovered from the recent record cold in their garden. Dale Holton reported that his potted *Pritchardia minor* have come through our recent record cold with no damage.

With proper irrigation and fertilization, many *Pritchardia* palms are well adapted to growing in our sandy soil. Some are more cold hardy than others. *P. vuylstekeana* seems the most cold hardy. In our garden, *P. vuylstekeana* and *P. woodfordiana* grow at a rapid rate similar to *P. pacifica*. For tropical beauty, few palms can match *P. pacifica* and *P. waialealeana*. Although some are susceptible to Lethal Yellowing and low temperatures, we should include these palms in our gardens for their sheer beauty



8 year-old *Pritchardia vuylstekeana* specimen growing in the Beck garden.

(Photo by Charlie Beck)



Pritchardia pacifica growing in Fiji. (Photograph contributed to the Australian Palm Society website by Chris King.)



5 year-old *Pritchardia woodfordiana* specimen growing in the Beck garden.



8 year-old *Pritchardia affinis* specimen growing in the Beck garden.



6 year-old *Pritchardia thurstonii* specimen growing in the Beck garden.



ABOVE AND BELOW: Two 4 year-old *Pritchardia waialealeana* specimens growing in the Beck garden.

