

# GROWING *Syagrus amara* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

*Submitted by Charlie Beck*

The Palm Society was fortunate to have Larry Noblick speak at our October meeting. Larry is the world authority on the genus *Syagrus*. He is not only extremely knowledgeable but is a very entertaining speaker. This is a rare combination in the world of palm biology. The *Syagrus* Larry spoke about was *Syagrus amara* and I wanted to share some of my experience growing this palm in Palm Beach County.

*Syagrus amara* is native to Trinidad and the Lesser Antilles. It grows below 1,000 feet elevation in both dry and wet coastal habitats. *S. amara* was

previously placed in the genus *Rhynchoceros*. *S. amara* is a solitary pinnate palm which typically grows in full sun. In habitat, the stems have an ultimate height of 60 feet and measure a maximum of eight inches in diameter. The stems are swollen at the base. The leaves can grow nine feet long. The leaflets are rigid and irregularly arranged in clusters and are very dark green.

My first sight of *S. amara* was at Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden. There were two 40' tall specimens flanking both sides of the Grand Overlook in the Bailey Palm Glade. This is the area with the twin staircases. The palms were an impressive sight but in 1992 Hurricane Andrew damaged one of these palms so they were replaced with the common *Phoenix dactylifera* - what a disappointing replacement!

We planted our two *S. amara* five years ago. They now measure 20 and 14 feet in overall height. The taller specimen is forming a stem with the typical flare at ground level. Above the flare the stem measures 12 inches in diameter. The leaves measure 12 feet long. Obviously these palms grow much larger in cultivation than in habitat. Periodic inundation does not harm this palm. With regular fertilization they have never shown any micronutrient deficiencies. Palm books recommend planting *S. amara* only in Zones 11 and 10b, but our specimens showed no cold damage during our last record cold winter. I think this palm would grow well anywhere in Palm Beach County.

People tend to discount the entire genus of *Syagrus* because of their familiarity with the common Queen Palm (*S. romanzoffiana*). There are several species of *Syagrus* that are unusual and worth planting - *S. amara* is one of them. Plant *S. amara* for its vigorous growth and its beautiful dark green ascending crown.

GROWING CONDITIONS IN OUR GARDEN FOR <i>Syagrus amara</i>	
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	3 times a year with Palm special analysis
Flooding	Periodic inundation in sandy soil acceptable
Light	Full sun
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None observed
Insect Damage	None observed
Hurricane Resistance	Good

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***Syagrus amara* growing in  
Homestead.**  
*(Photo by Charlie Beck)*



**Five year old *Syagrus amara*  
growing in the Beck garden.**  
*(Photo by Charlie Beck)*



***Syagrus amara* leaf detail.**  
*(Photo by Charlie Beck)*