

GROWING *Zombia antillarum* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Zombia antillarum is a monoecious, clustering palm endemic to the island of Hispaniola. It naturally grows on low elevation hills in dry areas. It is reported to be salt tolerant and to grow in serpentine soil in the Dominican Republic. This palm is endangered due to habitat destruction. The leaves are palmate, green above and silvery below. The leaflets have slightly bifid tips. The most distinctive feature of *Z. antillarum* is the stem. The stems are covered with straw colored fiber and are armed with stout, outward and downward pointing spines. This stem fiber is persistent and stays attractive for many years. The inflorescences are shorter than the leaves and the fruit color is white.

We have a single specimen of *Z. antillarum* planted in our garden. It was planted 19 years ago. The tallest stems top out at 12 1/2'. The stems measure 4" in diameter. The clump diameter is 2'. We planted our specimen in full sun but I have also seen well grown specimens grown in the shade. This is not a fast growing palm. It takes quite a few years for that unique stem to form but it is sure worth the wait. Most palm enthusiasts are drawn to the beauty of this palm.

Even though in nature this palm grows on dry hills and in some cases in serpentine soil, our specimen grows well in sandy soil which floods after repeated heavy rainfall. There is no need to mound this palm above grade to improve drainage. Twice a week irrigation seems to agree with this palm. Our record cold winters of 2009 and 2010 had no noticeable effect on our specimen. Even with regular fertilization *Z. antillarum* can occasionally show magnesium deficiency. This can easily be corrected with an application of dolomite lime or magnesium sulfate.

This palm is the perfect scale for planting in landscapes with one story houses. In habitat it is reported to top out at 10' tall. In cultivation it could grow taller but would still be in scale. Plant this palm close to walkways where the attractive stems can be appreciated. The clumping habit of this palm will tend to keep people from walking into the spiny stems.

Zombia antillarum has outperformed our native *Acoelorrhapha wrightii* (paurotis palm) in our garden. *Z. antillarum* is slower growing and is more compact, but it shows less nutritional deficiency than *A. wrightii*. Our *Z. antillarum* has bloomed for many years but has never set seeds. This can be considered a plus if you want to avoid a carpet of seedlings growing around your palm.



**Showy stems of
*Zombia antillarum***



**Nineteen year old
Zombia antillarum growing
in the Beck garden.**