



# Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

*Affiliate of the International Palm Society*

Monthly Update

March 2015

## UPCOMING MEETING

March 4, 2015

7:30 p.m. at

Mounts Botanical Garden

**Speakers:** Marshall Dewey

**Subject:** Innovative Palm Growing Techniques

### February Featured Auction Plants:

*Johannesteijsmannia altifrons*

*Neoveitchia storckii*

(last one of each)

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## FEBRUARY “THANK YOU”

**Door:** Tom Ramiccio

**Food:** Steve Aberbach, Don Bittel, Susan Cioci,  
Ruth Eberly, Ed Napoli, Tom Whisler

**Plants:** Mike Harris, Dale Holton

## VISIT US AT

[www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com](http://www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com)

All photographs in this issue were provided  
by Charlie Beck unless otherwise specified.

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**FEATURED THIS MONTH: *Syagrus botryophora***  
*by Charlie Beck*

*Syagrus botryophora* is a pinnate palm endemic to Brazil. Its natural habitat is tropical rainforest ranging from sea level to an altitude of 1,200 feet. It grows in a thin strip of land along the Atlantic coast between the tropical latitudes of 12 and 18 degrees south. The rainfall in this area is year round and there is no dry season. It grows in clayey lateritic soil which is heavy in iron and aluminum. This soil can be used as the raw material for making bricks. Its native area is threatened by habitat loss. It has been reported that much of the natural tree cover in this area is lost.

*S. botryophora* has a solitary stem which can grow 18 to 50 feet tall. Stems measure less than one foot in diameter. This palm is monoecious and a single specimen can set viable seeds. The fronds are strongly recurved and the leaflets are arranged in two planes to form a V-shape when looking down the rachis. Unlike many other *Syagrus* species the leaflets are not plumose. At the base of the fronds an ornamental fiber covers the stem. This species is reported to be one of the fastest growing palms - up to 6' of stem height per year. Due to this rapid growth, the crown of leaves is elongated while holding many ranks of healthy green leaves. Unfortunately this palm is not self-cleaning. It does hold several dried fronds but they do eventually drop and the number of dried fronds is low and they do not detract from this palm's attractiveness. This palm looks like a small version of *Carpentaria acuminata*.

*Syagrus botryophora* is a relative newcomer to South Florida. Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) first planted this palm in 2003. The palms planted at FTBG looked very healthy and they grew very rapidly. They had a very unique appearance due there small scale and their elongated crown of green fronds. I thought this palm would be strong grower in Palm Beach County. I soon planted one in our garden. I expected to see rapid growth as with the specimens at FTBG but the palm just lingered and didn't want to grow at all. Keep in mind that this palm received regular irrigation and was fed with a quality palm fertilizer at the recommended rates. Eventually it died. If my memory serves me correctly, this whole process was repeated with a second palm. It also died. In 2006 I tried a third *S. botryophora* convinced that I could be successful. At this time the palms at FTBG had grown quite tall. I thought that ample doses of dolomitic lime might raise the soil PH and supply extra magnesium to mimic growing conditions at FTBG. Well that didn't work either, so I tried an application of boron. That DID work. Since 2006 I have only applied boron twice, so it doesn't take a lot of

**CORRECTION**

In the February newsletter, we mistakenly reported that all photos for the "Back to Belize" article were taken by Dale Holton. We have since learned that some of the photographs featured in this article were submitted by Mike Harris. We extend our apologies for this error to Mike Harris.

extra effort. This palm responded with super-fast growth. In 9 years since planting it is now almost as tall as my 22 year old Maypan hybrid coconut palm which is also considered a fast growing palm.

When you consider that this is truly a tropical palm which grows in lateritic soil in its native habitat, it makes sense that it wasn't grown in South Florida earlier than it was. If you compare our 26.5 degree latitude to its native latitude of 12-18 degrees you might expect that it might be cold sensitive in our area, but it is reported to be cold hardy to USDA zone 9b which should cover most of Palm Beach County. I guess we should not be surprised that our sugar sand soil would be deficient in some required element.

Our specimen measures about 35' tall and the stem is 6" in diameter at waist height. Our fronds measure only 4' in length similar to the palms planted at FTBG. Reference books say that fronds can measure up to 9' long but I've never seen one with fronds that are that long. Four foot long fronds seem the typical length. I planted our palm in full sun and it seems well adapted to growth in full sun from an early age.

Reference books say that this palm is not wind resistant. Our palm has never been tested by a hurricane, but the older palms at FTBG survived hurricane activity in 2005 and 2006. Dale Holton confirmed, that in his experience, this palm is not resistant to high winds.

If you like the look of a palm with recurved fronds this might be the one for you. If properly fed it will probably be the fastest growing palm in your garden. Its small scale and rapid growth might make it the perfect palm for your landscape. I think it would be exceptionally handsome planted in groups beside a two story home.



9 year old *S. botryophora* beside  
22 year old Maypan Coconut



*Syagrus botryophora* extended crown



*Syagrus botryophora* stem fiber



*Syagrus botryophora* infructescence



Joey altifrons auction plant



5 year old Joey altifrons in the Beck garden



Cinco de Mayo



Black Cherry



Cream/Red Floridunda



Josephine Land

## The Tender Tropicals: The “Joey” Palms by Don Bittel

**Note: In 1999, Don Bittel wrote a series of articles regarding tender tropicals that were published in the Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society’s Palm & Cycad Times. This article is a reprint of one article from this series that was published in the December 1999 issue.**

In this series, I have focused on the spectacular palms that are also tender to grow. Arguably the most spectacular of all are the “Joey” palms, which are also not as tender as the others that have been covered.

“Joey” is an easy to pronounce nickname for the genus *Johannesteijsmannia*. It is pronounced just as it is spelled, but it still is quite a mouthful. Most growers and collectors just use the name *Joey*, as I will do for this article. The genus *Joey* consists of four species of palms endemic to Indonesia, Malaysia, and southern Thailand. *Joey altifrons* and *Joey magnifica* are commonly available as seedlings. *Joey lanceolata* and *Joey perakensis* are very rare and have never been commercially available.

All of the *Joey* palms are beautiful palms, because of their large, simple and entire leaves. The leaves are diamond shaped, dark green, and pleated. *Joey magnifica* has silver undersides to its leaf, making it even more gorgeous. The leaves vary from different localities, but can reach sizes of 10 feet long by six feet wide, on a six foot petiole. The average size is about six feet long by three feet wide. There can be up to 30 leaves in a big rosette, which makes for an impressive cluster. We may never grow these palms to that size in Florida, but they are still very impressive as smaller plants.

The *Joey* palms do not form trunks above ground (except in *Joey perakensis*). This makes them

ideal for potted specimens. They like deep, rich soil, and need to be in a pot that looks too large for the plant. They grow much faster if well watered and fertilized often. They are fairly slow growing, and resent being disturbed, so a larger pot will keep them from needing repotting as often also. The *Joey* palms are not as tender as you would expect from their tropical origins. I have not had any problems leaving mine outside when the temperatures get close to freezing. They will probably withstand a light freeze in a pot, and maybe lower if planted in the ground and protected. They require shade, since they are understory palms and do not grow in full sun.

The name *Johannesteijsmannia* comes from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch botanist, Johannes Teijsmann. *Altifrons* means with tall fronds, and of course *magnifica* means magnificent. The old genus name was *Teysmannia* named after S.E. Teysmann. The leaves of the *Joey* palms are used as thatch for roofs in the areas where it grows. The nurseries in Thailand are growing these palms by the thousands, so hopefully it will never become endangered in its native habitat.

We are indeed fortunate that these most beautiful of all palms can be grown in South Florida and do not need the pampering that some of the other tender tropicals need during our short but sometimes deadly cold snaps. So try growing these “Joey” palms: they are definitely worth the wait!

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 7th - 10:00 a.m. to noon

**Palm Society Ramble**

to the garden of Paul Humann

4980 SW 61st Ave., Davie, FL 33314

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**A Few Florida Friendly Roses**  
by Charlie Beck

I know this is a little off topic for our palm and cycad newsletter, but I felt compelled to share with you a few roses that are top performers in our garden. We have more than 30 roses grown in large containers and about 20 more planted in the ground. Growing roses in Florida can be quite a challenge, especially when you never spray with insecticides or fungicides. That is exactly how I grow roses. The roses either sink or swim. The ones that sink, I replace, so I'm always trying new ones. I don't regularly deadhead spent blooms, but I do prune back the bushes once or twice a year.

If you listen to rose experts, and I am not an expert, they say that the best rootstock for roses in Florida is Fortuniana. This may be true but I have successfully grown roses grafted on Dr. Huey rootstock and "own root" non-grafted roses. If you see a rose that appeals to you, give it a try. Even some "bargain box store roses" might thrive in your garden.

The roses described below and shown on page 4 have proven to be long lived plants which excel in our garden. All of these roses drop their petals on spent blooms. They do not hold onto dried brown petals.

Cinco de Mayo has interesting orange and brown overtones. Our plant has been container grown for over 10 years. This is probably our best

performing potted rose. The foliage stays relatively clean and it blooms all year. This rose was grafted onto Dr. Huey rootstock, but it is easy to find grafted onto Fortuniana rootstock at local nurseries.

Black Cherry was planted in the ground about 5 years ago. It is grafted onto Dr. Huey rootstock. When the bud is opening it is a much darker red. This rose blooms on and off all year. We have it planted next to Cream/Red floribunda which is also pictured. The two plants are intertwined and when the two roses bloom together, it is a memorable sight.

Cream/Red floribunda is a "bargain box store rose." This rose didn't even come with an official name- just a description of the color and the rose type. I'm not sure if it's grafted or if it grows on its own roots. This rose is planted in the ground and is still very healthy after several years of producing beautiful flowers.


Josephine Land is my "hands down" favorite rose. It blooms most of the year on healthy plants. The shell pink petals contrast nicely with the soft yellow stamens. It is also one of our most fragrant roses. We have two planted in the ground and one in a container. All three plants are strong performers. This rose is readily available at local garden centers. It is propagated by Nelson Florida Roses and is grafted onto Fortuniana rootstock.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

**2015 Annual Spring Palm & Cycad Sale**  
March 28 & March 29  
at Mounts Botanical Garden

Visit our website for details.

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