

GROWING *Acrocomia aculeata* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Acrocomia aculeata is a widespread palm naturally occurring on Caribbean Islands, Mexico, Central and South America. It grows from sea level up to an elevation of 3,500 feet. Several species of *Acrocomia* were described prior to 1995 when Henderson lumped all of the tall varieties into one species, *A. aculeata*. Recently, *Gastrococos crispata* was reclassified as *Acrocomia crispata*. Due to Henderson's lumping in 1995, there could be variability in growth rate and cold hardiness of this species, but all of the *A. aculeata* I have observed in South Florida and in our travels abroad looked similar in appearance.

GROWING CONDITIONS IN OUR GARDEN FOR <i>Acrocomia aculeata</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
Flooding	Periodic inundation in sandy soil acceptable
Fertilization	3 times a year with Palm special analysis
Light	Sun
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None observed
Insect Damage	None observed
Hurricane Resistance	Excellent

This is a graceful pinnate palm with plumose leaves. The crown size is somewhat larger than a *Veitchia* but smaller than a Royal Palm. The frond count is exceptionally high and rivals some *Phoenix* palms. The crown forms a full sphere of living fronds – even those that hang down vertically. All parts of this palm are very spiny. Our specimen is self-cleaning and even though the fronds are long, they are not heavy enough to damage underplantings as do Coconuts and Royals. This palm is the fastest growing palm in our garden – faster than *Roystoneas*, *Veitchias*, and *Carpentaria*. Our specimen was planted 13 years ago and quickly grew 40 feet tall with 13 foot long fronds with a 12 inch diameter stem. Most of its growth occurred early on and growth is now beginning to slow down.

A. aculeata was unaffected by our record setting cold winter. It showed no damage from the three hurricanes it weathered. It is flood resistant but occurs naturally in areas with seasonal rainfall so it is also drought tolerant. Our specimen is planted in full sun. Even though this monoecious palm has been producing seed for many years, it is not weedy like *Veitchias* which produce hundreds of seedlings under each palm.

If you like spiny palms, this is a good palm to plant. It is well adapted to growing in Palm Beach County. It would be a good substitute for *Wodyetia bifurcata* which are prone to nutritional deficiencies. The “foxtail” look can be obtained with the less commonly planted *A. aculeata*.



***Acrocomia aculeata* growing in the Beck garden.**
(Photos by Charlie Beck)



***Acrocomia aculeata* spiny trunk**



***Acrocomia aculeata* with fruit**