

# GROWING *Chamaedorea arenbergiana* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

*Submitted by Charlie Beck*

*Chamaedorea arenbergiana* is a solitary, pinnate palm native to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and possibly south through Central America and Columbia. It grows in moist or wet forests on both the Atlantic and Pacific slopes at elevations of 300 – 4,500'. This palm was introduced to European gardens prior to its official naming in 1850.

*Chamaedorea arenbergiana* stems grow to an ultimate height of 12' and range between 3/4 - 1-1/4" in diameter. The thin stems are green with tan leaf scars. The main attraction of this palm are the 6-8' long leaves. The leaflets can measure up to 6" wide which makes it among the widest pinnae in the genus. The leaflets also display long, drip tips which enhance its tropical appearance. Another distinctive feature is the closely packed infructescence. This unique infructescence always draws attention.

*C. arenbergiana* is close in appearance to *C. nationsiana* and *C. tepejilote*. I prefer *C. arenbergiana* over *C. nationsiana* and *C. tepejilote* because of the much wider leaflets. *C. tepejilote* also grows to twice the height which means the crown of leaves is out of close viewing range.

Reference books note that *C. arenbergiana* is not frost tolerant but I haven't noticed any cold damage over the past 11 years. *C. arenbergiana* seems well adapted to our sandy soil in Palm Beach County. With recommended fertilization our palms have never shown any nutritional deficiencies. Do plant this palm in the shade.

*C. arenbergiana* is not always available at South Florida nurseries. I will try to obtain some of these for our palm auctions. I do recommend growing this palm for its unique wide leaflets and its interesting infructescence. Its small stature allows close viewing and it's an easy fit in any garden.



*Chamaedorea arenbergiana*  
in the Beck garden



*Chamaedorea arenbergiana* infructescence  
in the Beck garden



LEAF COMPARISON: *C. tepejilote* (left) and  
*C. arenbergiana* (right) with five inch wide  
leaflets and drip tips