

GROWING *Copernicia curbeloi* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck



ABOVE: Nine year old *Copernicia curbeloi* growing in the Beck garden.

BELOW: *Copernicia curbeloi* petioles are green with contrasting black teeth.

(Photos by Charlie Beck)



Copernicia curbeloi is a solitary, monoecious, palmate palm with spiny petioles. It is native to central east Cuba and grows in low, moist savannas. In habitat, it can grow 45 feet tall. The stem typically bulges to 12 - 16 inches in diameter then tapers back to 8 - 9 inches in diameter above and below the bulge. It most closely resembles *C. yarey* var. *robusta* except it has a taller stem (with a bulge) and it has longer flowering and fruiting branchlets. *C. curbeloi* also resembles *C. baileyana* and *C. fallaensis* but is not as massive. The leaves are waxy and are reliably silver in color.

Andrew Henderson lumped *C. curbeloi* with *C. hospita* in his 1995 "Field Guide to the Palms of the Americas." "Kew World Checklist of Palms," as well as other scientific plant lists still list *C. curbeloi* as a valid species. The *C. curbeloi* in our garden display silver fronds similar to *C. hospita* but the growth habit is different. *C. curbeloi* is more robust and it holds many more fronds than *C. hospita*. There is a great photo of a mature specimen in habitat at the web address www.photomazza.com/?copernicia-curbeoli. (Note that the web address misspells *curbeloi*.)

We have three *C. curbeloi* planted in our garden. Two specimens are 12 years old and one is 9 years old. Unlike many *Copernicia* which suffer from magnesium and potassium deficiencies, *C. curbeloi* grows well with recommended fertilization and twice a week irrigation. Our 9 year old palm is 15 feet tall (overall height) with a 4 foot stem. Our 12 year old specimens measure an overall height of 12 feet. The fronds are 6 feet in diameter and the petioles are 5 ½ feet long. The jagged teeth on the petiole are black and contrast with the green petiole.

C. curbeloi is not an easy palm to find but occasionally you can find it offered for sale. You won't find it described in modern palm reference books. The only book I found it described in was the October 1963 "Gentes Herbarum – Revision of the Genus *Copernicia* West Indian Species." Of the 14 different species of *Copernicia* growing in our garden I'd say that *C. curbeloi* is the best grower. It may not grow at the fastest rate but it probably has the highest frond count of any of our solitary *Copernicia* palms and it never shows any nutritional deficiencies. *C. curbeloi* is the right scale for most of our landscapes with one-story homes. Unlike many of the giant *Copernicia* species that could threaten your house if toppled in a hurricane, *C. curbeloi* is a more manageable size. *C. curbeloi* is well adapted to growing in our sandy soils unlike many other *Copernicia* species which prefer limestone soil. Seek out *C. curbeloi* for your garden and you will be rewarded with a "showstopper palm."



ABOVE: Twelve year old *Copernicia curbeloi* growing in the Beck garden that displays the distinctive upright growth pattern.

BELOW: Nineteen year old *Copernicia hospita* growing in the Beck garden.

(Photos by Charlie Beck)

