

GROWING *Ptychosperma burretianum* and *Ptychosperma cuneatum* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Both of these species are native to the Papua New Guinea rain forest. They are small clumping palms with attractive wedge shaped pinnae. In habitat, *P. burretianum* tops out at 25' tall and *P. cuneatum* reportedly grows to 15' tall. Stems measure 1-1/4 to 1-3/4" in diameter. Emergent leaves of *P. burretianum* are pink whereas *P. cuneatum* displays green emergent leaves. Our specimen plants' crownshafts differ in color - *P. burretianum* tends to be silver or cream color and *P. cuneatum* is green.

Although these palms are native to the tropics, both grow well in our sandy soil in Palm Beach County. They are difficult to distinguish from each other. Aside from emergent leaf and crownshaft color they look quite similar. Clumping is sparse - expect only 4-5 stems in mature specimens. *P. burretianum* is more commonly offered for sale.

Our 19 year old *P. burretianum* is pictured on the cover. Its overall height is 12' and there are 4 stems measuring 1-1/4" in diameter. Our *P. cuneatum* is 14 years old and measures 13' in overall height. Its 3 main stems measure 1-3/4" in diameter. Both of these species came through the record cold winters of 2009 and 2010 without any damage. With recommended fertilization, no micro nutritional deficiencies have been noted. Periodic inundation after heavy rainfall does not seem to affect these palms.

The Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms states "*P. burretianum* is doubtfully distinct from *P. waitianum*." Kew's world checklist of selected plant families still lists *P. burretianum* as a valid species. There is quite a bit of hybridization occurring in the genus *Ptychosperma*. All you need to do is search the internet for photos of *P. burretianum* and *P. cuneatum* to verify that mislabeling and hybridization occurs with these wedge shaped leaflet palms. I suggest that any *Ptychosperma* which looks true to the species description as a young potted plant, will stay true to form as a mature palm and is worth growing.

These palms grow best in a shaded location. Twice-a-week irrigation is sufficient for healthy growth. Their scale suits even small gardens and their wedge shaped leaflets are quite attractive.



A 19 year old *Ptychosperma burretianum*
growing in the Beck garden.



A 14 year old *Ptychosperma cuneatum*
in the Beck garden.