

GROWING *Wallichia disticha* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Wallichia disticha is a medium size, solitary palm native to Bangladesh, China, East Himalaya and Thailand. It grows in lowland to montane forest at elevations of 1,500 – 2,500 feet. Its native habitat is considered moist to wet and it is reported to grow to 30 feet tall in habitat.

This is a pinnate, monoecious palm and is monocarpic (dies after flowering). The typical lifespan of this palm is 15 years – at that time frond production ceases and flowering commences and continues for approximately two years. The fruit contains corrosive oxalic acid crystals which may irritate your skin if handled without gloves.

This palm has both distinctive and attractive features. The most distinctive feature is the frond growth pattern. Its fronds grow in a single plane arranged alternately on either side of the stem. This growth pattern is technically called distichous. The stem is covered in persistent coarse black fibers which add to the beauty of this palm. Leaflets have jaggedly toothed margins and tips, similar to *Arenga*. The leaflets are green above and are silver below. Leaflets are irregularly arranged and distinctly fanned in bundled groups of 2 – 4.

Our original planting of three *W. disticha* grew vigorously but due to its monocarpic habit succumbed in 8 years without producing fruit. Ten years ago we planted three more specimens of *W. disticha*.

These palms are still growing vigorously. They range 15 – 20 feet tall in overall height. The fronds can measure up to 13 feet long. Three quarters of the stem is covered with healthy green fronds. Stems measure 9 – 10 inches in diameter. I believe these palms look best if planted by themselves so that the distichous arrangement of fronds can be readily recognized. These palms would be perfect to plant beside a wall. Our specimens held their growth orientation of the fronds even from an early age.

Even though these palms are from high altitudes, their native habitat is still a tropical climate. Many of the reference books suggest growing this palm in only the warmest sub-tropical areas. I have observed no stunting or burning of these palms due to cold over the last 19 years. I submit that these palms do have a higher degree of cold hardiness than what reference books state. Our specimens are grown in partial shade but I've seen specimens growing beautifully in full shade and I think they would also grow well in full sun. I've never noticed any nutritional deficiency on our *W. disticha* specimens.

Grow this palm for its distinctive distichous growth pattern. The clustered, jagged leaflets and the interesting fibred stem will surely attract admirers. This palm is not commonly available at nurseries but when a seed source is available it can be found.



***Wallichia disticha*
in the Beck garden.**
(Photo by Charlie Beck)



Wallichia disticha topside and underside leaf.



Wallichia disticha stem.



Wallichia disticha at the
Townsville Palmetum in Australia.
(Photo posted on PACSOA website and
contributed by John L. Dowe
from *Palms and Cycads*
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