Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

Affiliate of the International Palm Society

Monthly Update October 2016

September "THANK YOU"

Door:	Roland Grondin & Don Bittel
Food:	Don Bittel, Doyle Cochran, Janice DiPaola, Steve Garland, Patrick Morris, Chris Spencer, Angie Peacock, Angela Valero
Plants:	Dave Colonna, Dominic Colonna, Marshall Dewey
Auction:	Don Bittel & Terry Lynch

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

UPCOMING MEETING

October 5, 2016
7:30 p.m.
At Mounts Botanical Garden

Speaker: Dr. Larry Noblick
Palm Biologist at Montgomery Botanical Garden
Subject: Exploring the Seychelles: Home of the Double Coconut

FEATURED AUCTION PLANTS:

Kerriodoxa elegans
Verschaffeltia splendida

VISIT US AT

www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com

All photographs in this issue were provided by Charlie Beck unless otherwise specified.

Featured This Month: *Chamaedorea brachypoda* and *Chamaedorea stolonifera*

by Charlie Beck

Chamaedorea brachypoda and *Chamaedorea stolonifera* are small palms with simple bifid leaves. Although they are considered clustering palms, they do not form a clump of stems tightly packed around the center. These palms spread by the use of above or below ground shoots which create space between the stems. All palms in the genus *Chamaedorea* are dioecious, requiring both male and female plants for seed production.

Chamaedorea brachypoda is a lowland species native to the Atlantic Coast of Guatemala and Honduras. This palm is considered critically endangered in the wild. It was originally described in 1947 from specimens found in a forested area in Izabal, Guatemala. It is reported that this location has been deforested and is now used for cattle grazing. A small population of this palm remains under the shade of a single *Attalea* sp. This surviving palm cluster is repeatedly eaten to the ground by cattle but survives due to its spreading rhizomes sprouting new stems. In undisturbed habitat this palm typically grows in dense shade. Average annual rainfall in this palm's natural range is approximately 76" which is 22% more than what we receive in West Palm Beach.

Don Hodel described an interesting historical account of *Chamaedorea stolonifera* in his book, Chamaedorea Palms. *C. stolonifera* was collected in Mexico and was cultivated in England and Germany as early as 1882. The original description and naming of this palm was based on cultivated specimens growing at Kew Garden in England. This palm wasn't seen in habitat again until 1949. Until the 1970's most cultivated specimens were male and only 3 female palms were known to exist. In 1989, female specimens were discovered growing in Chiapas, Mexico on Atlantic limestone slopes at elevations of 2000-2600'. Collection of female plants were made for propagation purposes. Currently, *C. stolonifera* is considered endangered in the wild.

Both of these palms have a similar running growth habit. *C. brachypoda* spreads by below ground rhizomes and *C. stolonifera* typically spreads by above ground stolons, even though stolons have been reported to traverse sidewalks underground. The rate of stem production is similar in both of these species. Distance between stems of *C. stolonifera* is about twice that of *C. brachypoda*, so it spreads more quickly. In our garden, after 18 years of growth, the *C. brachypoda* clump is 8' across, and after 17 years the *C. stolonifera* clump is about 14' across. The size of the clump can be easily restricted by cutting or removing the pencil thick stems. These palms are not aggressive spreaders such as *Rhapis excelsa*, the Lady Palm.

In our garden *C. brachypoda* stems have grown 6' tall. *C. stolonifera* stems are a little shorter at 4-1/2' tall. Stems typically grow straight and remain vertical. Stems do not tend to bend or lean as do some of the other *Chamaedorea* species. Both palms grow well in our Palm Beach County sugar sand. Neither palm has shown any nutritional deficiency when regularly irrigated and fertilized at recommended rates. Considering that *C. stolonifera* grows on solid limestone in its native habitat, it appears quite adaptable. Both of these palms look best when grown in full or partial shade. They will survive in full sun but the fronds will be lighter green. These palms are cold hardy in our climate. Neither palm showed any damage after our record cold winters of 2009 and 2010.

Leaves have a similar shape but *C. brachypoda* leaves are wider and lighter green, sometimes with a hint of mottling. *C. stolonifera* has thicker dark green leaves held on shorter petioles. Old dried fronds persist a litter longer on *C. brachypoda* but they seem to disappear under the healthy emergent foliage.

Both of these palms make an attractive ground cover in a garden situation. Even though the spreading habit of these palms is easily controlled, you might rather grow them in a large pot. The tight cluster of bifid leaves could create a contrast in texture, which might be just what you need to beautify a spot in your garden.

Availability of these palms is not good. Due to the limited number of female plants, seed is not available. Nurseries are less inclined to propagate palms by division. I plan to dig up some stems and establish them in pots to share at upcoming society meetings.

Chamaedorea brachypoda (above and below)

Chamaedorea stolonifera (above and below)

Attalea crassispatha in the Beck Garden
(top left) Netted immature infructescence
*(*top right) *Attalea crassispatha* crown
(bottom left) Mature fruit
(bottom right) Stem base 3.6’ diameter at ground, 2.3’diameter at waist level

Seeding *Attalea crassispatha*

by Charlie Beck

In 1991, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) launched an expedition to save a Haitian palm from extinction. *Attalea crassispatha* was almost gone from the wild. They found only 13 mature specimens on the island. They collected seed with the thought of growing palms to maturity in South Florida. Seeds produced from Florida grown palms could be germinated and then those palms could be planted back into their native Haitian habitat. It was a risky project because a few *Attalea crassispatha,* which were planted at FTBG prior to 1947, had never fruited.

From the seeds collected in Haiti, FTBG planted 13 palms in the Palmetum as tribute to the 13 remaining palms found in Haiti. FTBG also planted 21 other specimens throughout the garden. Seedlings were shared with various South Florida gardens such as Montgomery Botanical Center, which lists 4 plants in their collection. Another planting was made at the Tropical Research & Education Center in Homestead, FL. A few seedlings were given away for planting in private gardens. Chuck Hubbach, then Curator of Palms at FTBG, made a presentation describing the effort to save this palm from extinction at one of our Palm Beach Palm and Cycad Society meetings. Chuck donated a seedling *A. crassispatha* for auction at that meeting. I cast the winning bid and was lucky to bring home this extremely rare palm.

We planted this palm in our garden in 1995. It has been a vigorous grower. At one time it suffered from boron deficiency but it quickly recovered after an application of borax. This is a beautiful palm which always attracts a lot of attention. It's the only self-cleaning *Attalea sp*.

Our palm starting blooming a couple of years ago. It never set any fruit. I attempted to hand pollinate it but my 20' extension ladder wasn't tall enough and I wasn't brave enough to use our 32' ladder on uneven ground. I left pollination to the bees.

A couple weeks ago Dale Holton stopped by and asked if our *A. crassispatha* was fruiting. Dale read a report that there was a palm seeding in Dade County. Upon inspection of our specimen, Dale spotted a fully fruited infructescence. I quickly hung a fish net over the bract so that ripening fruit could be caught. The fruit changed from green to orange and fell into the fish net. One morning I found fruit all over the ground, many of the seeds were gone and the stripped fruit was laying on the ground. I discovered that squirrels were feasting on the seeds. Despite the squirrels, I did collect a supply of seeds. Hopefully some of the offspring will be returned to Haiti and others will be planted in South Florida.

Boron Deficiency in *Phoenix sylvestris*

by Charlie Beck

Stunted fronds emerged on our *Phoenix sylvestris*. Frond length was reduced and tips were not fully formed (see arrows on photo). I sprinkled ½ cup of dry borax evenly over the entire root zone. This amount is twice what is generally recommended, but I applied more due to the large size of the palm. A few months later a whole set of healthy new fronds emerged.

Palm Society Annual Fall Palm & Cycad Sale

Saturday, October 8th, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 9th, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

At Mounts Botanical Garden

Palm Society Annual Member Picnic and Best Auction of the Year

Saturday, October 15th
10:00 a.m. - Garden Tour
11:30 a.m. - Pot Luck Lunch
Noon - Auction

Please bring a chair, main or side dish, and a plant donation (any kind) for the auction.

Address will be emailed to members.