GROWING
Thrinax radiata
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Thrinax radiata is native to the Florida Keys, the Bahamas, Caribbean Islands east of Puerto Rico, and along the mainland Caribbean coast of Mexico, Belize and Honduras. It grows in coastal scrub and pine forest, on either limestone or sandy soil. This is a very salt and wind tolerant palm. Its common name is the Florida Thatch Palm.

T. radiata is a solitary palm which can grow to an overall height of 40'. Stems typically measure 5" in diameter and can develop a root boss at its base. Palmate leaves measure 4' across and are held on 3' long petioles. Leaf bases split where they attach to the stem. Fronds have pendent leaf tips and a prominent pointed hastula. Old fronds are not completely self-cleaning but the few fronds that persist are not unattractive.

T. radiata is a monoecious palm with hermaphroditic flowers. Inflorescences are arching and do not extend beyond the leaves. Mature fruit are white. This palm is a good choice for native wildlife. Birds eat the fruit and nest in the crown. Also, it's a host plant for the Monk Skipper Butterfly.

T. radiata is a common palm in Palm Beach County. Even though its native range does not extend this far north, it's a strong grower here. This palm loves growing in our humid climate. It is reported difficult to grow in arid areas such as California. In South Florida, this palm is often planted in highway medians, parking lots and any other inhospitable location you can imagine. This palm survives on its own without irrigation or fertilization and looks great! *T. radiata* outperforms most palms in resilience, competing with *Sabal palmetto, Serenoa repens, and Sabal etonia* for the toughest Florida palm.

One day while visiting the Palm Beach County Library, Lantana Branch, I noticed a group of these palms growing happily in the landscape. Meanwhile, right beside them was a Veitchia sp. which cried out for feeding. *Veitchia* palms are usually considered tough palms that can grow in harsh situations but this one was completely yellow. Right beside it, in the same bed, were the healthy, dark green *T. radiata.* In the same parking lot, rows of *Roystonia regia* palms are slowly dying from neglect. Many of them have already died. I warned the library manager years ago that an application of manganese sulfate would probably save them, but I guess the expense wasn't covered in the budget. (See photos on page 4) The Native Plant Society and Palm Beach County support growing native palms and I agree, but plant palms which can thrive in our native soil. Just because Royal Palms thrive in the swampy, marl soil of the Fakahatchee Strand doesn't mean they can survive neglect in a parking lot in sandy soil.

I've always enjoyed growing this palm. *T. radiata* was one of the first palms planted in our garden. Our tallest specimen, planted 23 years ago, is 18' tall measured to the lowest green frond. Vertical growth is slow and steady, even in a pampered garden situation, so these palms will not outgrow their situation. They are the perfect palm for planting beside a one story home. We have six palms in our garden and all have thrived. They have withstood hurricanes and flooding, and have never required any special attention. These palms are cold hardy in all of Palm Beach County.

Thrinax radiata
23 years old in the Beck Garden

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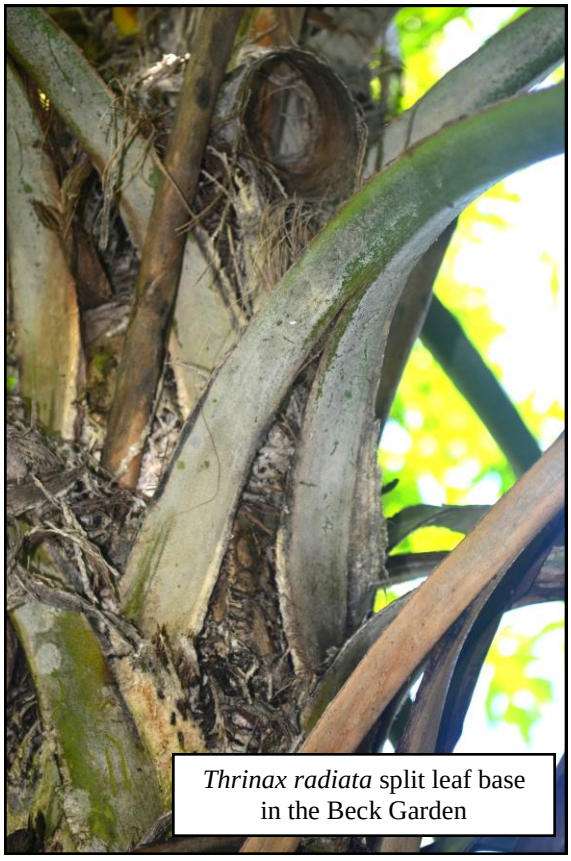

Thrinax radiata split leaf base
in the Beck Garden

Thrinax radiata hastula
in the Beck Garden

7 years after planting at Lantana Library *Thrinax radiata* thrives while *Vetchia sp*. suffer

7 years after planting at Lantana Library, Royal Palms die in succession (single irrigation bubbler at base of each palm)

Thrinax radiata root boss in the Beck Garden