

GROWING *Astrocaryum mexicanum* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Astrocaryum mexicanum is a small solitary palm native to Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras. It grows to 20 feet tall. Typical habitat is moist lowland forest. It does not grow in areas that remain inundated. This palm is monoecious with inflorescences bearing male and female flowers. Fruit is eaten by rodents, monkeys, fish, and people. The stem can vary from one to three inches in diameter. As with all *Astrocaryum*, the stems, fruit, and leaves are armed with sharp black flattened spines. *Astrocaryum* can be distinguished from the equally spiny genus of *Bactris* by the leaf underside – *Astrocaryum* is whitish, where *Bactris* is typically green. Juvenile leaves appear simple. As the palm matures, the simple leaves tend to split into uneven wide segments. There is a variety which displays mature leaves with evenly spaced, thin pinnae.

GROWING CONDITIONS IN OUR GARDEN FOR <i>Astrocaryum mexicanum</i>	
Location	4 miles from ocean in suburban Lantana
Soil	Sand over a layer of hardpan (pineland flatwood habitat)
Irrigation	¾ inch applied twice a week
Fertilization	3 times a year with Palm special analysis
Flooding	Periodic inundation in sandy soil acceptable
Light	Deep shade
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None observed
Insect Damage	None observed
Hurricane Resistance	Good

We have two *A. mexicanum* growing in our garden - one with wide leaf segments (see page 2) and one with thin pinnae (see page 10). Both specimens looked similar as young seedlings. If the variety with wide leaflets is preferred, it is best to buy a larger palm displaying mature leaves.

Our thin leaf specimen was planted in the ground 13 years ago. Its stem is two inches in diameter and the overall height is nine feet. Our wide leaf specimen is 10 years old and has a three inch diameter stem and an eight foot overall height. The fronds of both varieties are five feet long.

Astrocaryum mexicanum is well adapted to growing in our sandy soils if regular irrigation is applied. It grows best in full shade but will grow in a semi-shaded location. With regular fertilization, I have never noticed minor nutritional deficiencies. Our palms showed no cold damage after our most recent record cold winter.

Plant *A. mexicanum* where a small showy palm is required in a shady location. The wide leaf segment variety is unsurpassed in its tropical look. The thin leafy variety is also quite attractive. The showy white leaf underside and the jet black spines on the stems make this palm a real standout. *Astrocaryum mexicanum* is not a fast grower but is a reliable, steady grower well adapted to Palm Beach County.



Astrocaryum mexicanum thin leaf variety growing in the Beck garden.
(Photo by Charlie Beck)



Astrocaryum mexicanum wide leaf variety growing in the Beck garden.
(Photo by Charlie Beck)