

GROWING
Seeding *Attalea crassipatha*
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

In 1991, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) launched an expedition to save a Haitian palm from extinction. *Attalea crassipatha* 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 crassipatha*, 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. crassipatha* 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. crassipatha* 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.



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

GROWING
Attalea crassipatha
SET TO BLOOM IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

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Critically endangered *Attalea crassipatha* is set to bloom in the Beck garden. Inflorescence will soon emerge from multiple spadix. This palm was planted in 1996 and has grown 15 feet of stem measuring just under 3 feet in diameter at waist height. Even though its normal habitat is limestone, it grows well in sandy soils. This palm is larger than all of the dozens planted at Fairchild in the same year.

Attalea crassipatha is endemic to Haiti. In the early 1990s, only a couple dozen plants were reported to remain in its native habitat. Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden propagated seeds from these plants as part of an effort to reestablish this palm in Haiti and also establish a population at Fairchild Garden. Chuck Hubbach, then curator of palms at Fairchild, gave a presentation on this effort and donated a palm for our after meeting auction. The seedling was auctioned for \$250 – still a Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society all time high.

