

GROWING *Borassus aethiopium* **IN PALM BEACH COUNTY**

Submitted by Charlie Beck



Thirteen years ago, I planted three of these palms spaced on 20-foot centers. The palms were in three gallon pots and the leaves were approximately 12 inches high. They were planted in soil consisting of four feet of sugar sand over a layer of hardpan. This is typical of pineland flatwood habitat in Palm Beach County. The soil can flood after heavy rain and plants have been inundated for up to five days at a time. Supplemental irrigation during dry times is applied at a rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water twice a week.

The palms are fertilized three times a year with Palm Special analysis as recommended by the University of Florida. These palms have never shown any micronutrient deficiencies.

The fronds are gray green palmate, 10 feet in diameter and are noticeably larger than Bismarkia. The jet black petioles are six inches wide and 9 feet long. They are armed with jagged teeth and remain attached after 13 years of growth. The trunks are five feet in diameter where they enter the ground. In 13 years since planting, they have grown 35 to 40 feet tall. The male first bloomed at 12 years and the females first fruited at 13 years.

These three palms have survived three Category 1 hurricanes during their tenth and eleventh years of growth. There was no major damage observed after the hurricanes and no tipping of trunks occurred.

Fruits are 6.5 inches in diameter and weigh up to five pounds each. Standing or sitting under these palms when females are dropping fruit can be dangerous.

We have noticed that raccoons prefer to nest in the top of these palms and it is a thrill to watch the baby raccoons climb down the petioles as if they were a spiral staircase.

These spectacular palms are fast -growing, durable, and should be more widely planted in Palm Beach County.