

**GROWING**  
***Chamaedorea adscendens***  
**IN PALM BEACH COUNTY**

*Submitted by Dale Holton*

*Chamaedorea adscendens* is a very attractive, easy to grow, small palm. I first saw this palm in the south of Belize in 1996. The habitat is on the tops of the low mountains. It is only found growing on the top 50 feet of the mountaintops growing in a foot or two of rotting leaf litter under tree canopy. These hills are quite steep and you would think that some seeds would roll down the hill and germinate, but no. There are none below the invisible line. Most of the plants were about 3' to 4' tall and in dense colonies. You can grasp a plant by its base and lift it up. They are growing in about 2 to 3 feet of rotting leaf litter on limestone rock.

I have found through the years that they do best in acidic organic soil. They look best planted in clumps and must be grown in shade. They will flower and set seed readily. Like *C. metallica*, if they get too tall, you most likely could air layer them and replant them.

Since I last visited the area, there have been one or two hurricanes that leveled many of the tall trees. I went there a year after the first storm, but the local Indians would not take me out in the woods. They said it was too dangerous with all of the fallen trees. I plan to go back in early 2015 to see how the plants have recovered.

The description of *C. adscendens* in Hodel's book on *Chamaedorea* said that he found them growing on bare limestone rock. I wonder about that as I have not seen that in Belize. They do best in acidic mediums.

These plants are available from Mike Harris or me.

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*Submitted by Charlie Beck*

*Chamaedorea adscendens* is a small pinnate palm native to the Atlantic slope in Belize and Guatemala. It is reported to be rare in the wild. It grows to elevations of 2000' on limestone covered in organic mulch. Native forest habitat is typically moist to wet, but this palm is reported to be quite hardy during time of drought.

Immature plants can have simple bifid leaves but the leaflets tend to separate as the palm matures. The leaflets are thick and leathery. They are a blue green color with a velvety texture. This velvet leaf texture is the main attraction of this palm. It is a unique feature which makes this palm very desirable.

*C. adscendens* is a dioecious palm with very attractive male and female inflorescences. The female infructescence is bright orange and displays mature black fruit. The drooping male inflorescence is bright yellow. If you have male and female plants they readily set seed.

*C. adscendens* has a solitary stem which measures about a quarter inch in diameter. Ultimate height of this palm is about 7'. Sometimes the stem can become decumbent but this is not common. Leaves measure only one foot in length.

We planted a few of these gems in our garden in 2006. They are planted by the house in packed shell rock brought in to form a base for home construction. I typically add a thick layer of mulch to conserve moisture and to enrich the soil. I believe this planting method mimics this palm's native habitat. They are strong growers and have never suffered from minor nutritional deficiencies when regularly fertilized and irrigated.

Although some reference books recommend planting this palm in USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 10b and 11, I didn't notice any evidence of cold sensitivity during the record cold winters of 2009 or 2010. I think this palm would be cold hardy throughout zone 10a.

Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) lists only eight *C. adscendens* planted in their garden. This low number of plants at FTBG reflects the limited availability of this choice little palm. Due to Dale Holton's exploration, this palm is readily available at Holton Nursery and Caribbean Palms Nursery. I hope you find a place in your garden for *C. adscendens*.

*Chamaedorea adscendens*



**Infructescence with a mature seed**  
(Photo courtesy of PalmPedia)



**Male inflorescence**



**Specimen in the Beck garden**