

GROWING
Coccothrinax borhidiana
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Dale Holton

I first saw *Coccothrinax borhidiana* on one of my early trips to Cuba. I must say that I was truly amazed. They looked like miniature Petticoat Palms (*Copermecia Macrogolsa*).

The palms grew on a very remote coastal shelf on the North coast that consisted of what is referred to as "Dog Tooth" limestone. This is limestone that is very rough and full of fissures. It is somewhat difficult to walk on. This area was about 50-60 feet above the ocean. The palms were scattered at the bottom of a hill and across the shelf. There may have been as many as 100 plants, with most of them being small plants. The largest plants were about 12 feet tall. On later visits to the same area, I was distressed to see a large number of large trailers parked near the area. This area contains oil, and the trailers were for workers that were going to drill wells. I have heard that the area is now dotted with oil wells and I do not know the fate of those very rare palms. Hopefully they are being protected, as this is the only colony on the entire island.

All of the plants that I have (except for new seedlings) are from those wild plants. I have found them to be painfully slow growing. I have grown them in my regular potting soil and also in pea rock. The ones in pea rock seem to grow slower, but have less nutritional problems. Over the years, I have noticed another problem which I call SPD (sudden plant death). So far I have not seen this in the plants which are in the pea rock. Also the original seeds germinated over a period of 3 years. This is very unusual for *Coccothrinax* as usually the seeds rot after the first year.

My plants in the ground are 18 inches to 6 feet tall. They have been in the ground 10-12 years, except for one or two replacements. This area of my yard was not irrigated until this year. The area these palms come from experiences 5-6 months with very little rainfall every year. I also put a large amount of limestone rock into the planting area before planting. I do not cut off the old leaves, so they look like they would in habitat. The two largest plants have been flowering for the last three years. They get fertilized about twice a year. These are stunning plants and do very well in South Florida. As I raise more plants, the price should come down. The big problem is to be sure that there are no other *Coccothrinax* flowering at the same time. They will readily hybridize.



Coccothrinax borhidiana (left and top right) growing in habitat and (bottom right) growing in the Holton garden.

(Photos by Dale Holton)