

GROWING *Copernicia ekmanii* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Copernicia ekmanii is endemic to the north coast of Haiti. This species is presently on the IUCN red list of endangered plants. There are only an estimated 1,200 plants left in the wild. In habitat it grows in lowland scrub on rocky shores near the sea. It grows in a plant community comprising of cacti, bunch grass, and thorn scrub. Its habitat is so harsh there is little chance of loss due to conversion to agriculture. Local people do threaten the remaining plants by collection of leaves for thatch and harvest of stems for construction.

Copernicia ekmanii is a medium sized fan palm with silver leaves. In habitat maximum stem height is 15' but cultivated plants can reach heights of 30'. The leaves are waxy and are well adapted to high winds. On sizable specimens a skirt of old leaves form to add appeal of this palm. The large *C. ekmanii* at Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden (FTBG) withstood the category 5 winds of Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

For years a single specimen was grown at FTBG. It regularly produced crops of non-viable seeds. *C. ekmanii* was not available for sale at any of the Palm Society sales. Viable seeds became available prior to 2000 from a source in the Florida Keys. I planted out our single specimen in 2001. It grows without any supplemental irrigation on a mound of hardpan soil which was dug up to allow installation of a septic drain field. Although there have been reports of cold sensitivity in areas more than 5 miles inland our specimen was not damaged by the record cold 2009-2010 winters. I have seen beautiful specimens at Mike Harris' garden in Cooper City, FL and also at the Eigelberger's estate, Casa Phippsberger, in Palm Beach. I would not recommend planting this species west of Military Trail due to its cold sensitivity.

Our specimen is growing a little slower than most other *Copernicia* species. In 12 years it has grown to an overall height of 7'. The leaves are quite showy with their silver color and their armed petioles. This is a very distinctive palm which would never be confused with any of the other common silver leaved palms. With a little more height I hope the petticoat of old leaves will soon form. When they form, the inflorescences will extend beyond the crown of leaves.

I am told that Caribbean Palm Nursery (see ad on page 5) offers this rare species for sale. I encourage all members east of Military Trail to consider growing this beautiful and rare palm. We are lucky to have this palm, which was sought after for so many years, now available for sale. Every *C. ekmanii* grown in South Florida helps continued survival of this endangered palm.



Copernicia ekmanii at Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden.



Copernicia ekmanii in the Beck garden (12 years old).

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON
Copernicia ekmanii
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY**

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Last month we featured *Copernicia ekmanii*. We suggested that the success of growing this palm west of Military Trail was questionable due to cold sensitivity. Mike Harris has reported growing this palm in the ground successfully in Loxahatchee (see photo on page 6). He also said that Paul Craft has a healthy specimen of *C. ekmanii* planted at his property in Loxahatchee. Apparently this palm is more cold hardy than was reported although potted palms of this species appear to be cold sensitive.



Copernicia ekmanii growing in Mike Harris' garden in Loxahatchee.
(Photo by Mike Harris)



Copernicia ekmanii in the Harris garden.