

# GROWING *Copernicia rigida* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

*Submitted by Charlie Beck*

*Copernicia rigida* is a palm native to central and eastern Cuba. It grows on savannas, open pinelands, and serpentine scrub. In habitat its stem can reach 45' in height and can measure 10-14" in diameter. It is similar in appearance to *C. macroglossa* but instead of semicircular leaves it grows narrow leaves which resemble slender cuts of pie. The leaves are so tightly whirled, the crown resembles a shuttlecock. The leaves remain in the upright position and become a litter trap. The Australian Palm Society states, "Some botanists are raising the possibility that *C. rigida* is carnivorous. Its leaves form a very effective trap for small animals, which die and rot there, providing nutrients for the plant."

This palm is reported to be less cold hardy than *C. macroglossa* but I have not noticed any difference in our garden. You need a lot of patience growing this palm. We have three 12 year old specimens which range from 1' to 7' tall. The footprint of this palm is only 6' in diameter, so it's a good palm for a small garden. This palm is quite rare in cultivation but it is occasionally available at palm sales.

*C. rigida* does hybridize in nature. There are two named, natural hybrids which occur in Cuba. *Copernicia X sueroana* is *C. rigida* crossed with *C. hospita*. *Copernicia X vespertilionium* is *C. rigida* crossed with *C. gigas*. Both of these hybrids are very attractive and they grow much faster than *C. rigida*. Both hybrids are large palms which rival *C. baileyana* in size. See the photos on page 11 of 12 year old hybrids growing in our garden. Refer to article on *Copernicia macroglossa* for cultural requirements of *Copernicia rigida*. These two species have similar requirements. *C. rigida* is slower growing than *C. macroglossa*, but *C. rigida* can grow taller and have a larger caliper stem. *C. rigida* does have a smaller footprint and is reported to be less cold hardy than *C. macroglossa*.



**Copernicia rigida growing at  
Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden.**



*Copernicia rigida* leaf detail  
(See yardstick on left)



*Copernicia rigida* litter trap



Twelve year old *Copernicia rigida*  
in the Beck Garden.

**FABULOUS**  
***Copernicia rigida* hybrids**



LEFT: Twelve year old Copernicia X sueroana with an overall height of 18' growing in the Beck garden.

BELOW: Twelve year old Copernicia X vespertilionium with an overall height of 22' growing in the Beck garden.

