

GROWING *Corypha umbraculifera* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Corypha umbraculifera is a spectacular palm. It produces the largest palmate leaves of any plant – reported up to 25 feet in diameter with impressive 10 foot long petioles armed with jagged black teeth.



Trunks have been measured up to 3 feet in diameter and 90 feet tall. Its common name is the talipot palm and it is native to India and Sri Lanka.

Corypha umbraculifera is monocarpic, which means it flowers once and then dies. It produces the largest inflorescence among all flowering plants. The inflorescence resembles a 30 foot tall and 40 foot wide Christmas tree which extends straight up from the top of the trunk.

I have three *Corypha umbraculifera* in my Palm Beach County garden. I have found that they are well-adapted to our area but have noticed quite a variation in growth rate. One specimen was planted 16 years ago and the leaves top out at 10 feet. Two other specimens were planted 10 years ago and are 15 and 24 feet tall. The younger plants are planted on a 3 foot high berm with unimpeded drainage and the largest plant is approximately 30 feet from a septic drain field. This must account for the very rapid growth. The oldest specimen is planted at a low elevation which is prone to flooding during heavy rainfall. This palm always looks healthy but has grown much slower. The largest specimen has leaves of 12 feet in diameter displayed on 9 foot long

petioles.

I have noticed that once this palm develops a trunk of considerable height, the leaves and petioles



Variable growth rate of two specimens planted 10 years ago

become greatly reduced in size, so this palm is at its best while the crown is still close to the ground. This is good because at this young stage it is not hurricane resistant. If you were to lose this palm in a hurricane, it is best to lose a specimen with a short trunk. Fairchild Tropical Gardens had a 50 foot tall specimen survive Hurricane Andrew but this palm had a much smaller crown of leaves at that height.

I believe this palm should be more widely planted in Palm Beach County. No palm is a more impressive sight. Even immature specimens have a distinct appearance

which will draw attention. The 30 foot footprint of this palm is no larger than many of the commonly planted woody trees so the size of this palm should not deter the palm enthusiast from planting it. You can even sit out in light rains and stay dry while protected by the massive leaves.



Jagged black teeth along petiole