

GROWING
Dictyosperma album
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Dictyosperma album is native to the Mascarene Islands. This palm, which can grow from sea level to an altitude of 2,000 feet, is a solitary, pinnate, monoecious (male and female flowers on the same inflorescence) palm that develops a somewhat swollen crownshaft. The crownshafts range from green to grey to brown. The trunks have swollen bases and the inflorescence looks like a horse tail or rooster tail. The most distinguishing feature is that the newly emergent leaves stand as vertical spears. In habitat, palms can grow 40 feet tall but they are reported near extinction in the wild. Common names are Princess and Hurricane Palm.

GROWING CONDITIONS IN OUR GARDEN FOR <i>Dictyosperma album</i>	
Location	4 miles from ocean in suburban Lantana
Soil	Sand over a layer of hardpan (pineland flatwood habitat) or alkaline shell rock
Irrigation	¾ inch applied twice a week
Flooding	Periodic inundation in sandy soil acceptable
Fertilization	3 times a year with Palm special analysis
Light	Sun
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None observed
Insect Damage	None observed
Hurricane Resistance	Good
Lethal Yellowing	Moderate Risk

These palms grow well in South Florida. They are not prone to micro-nutritional deficiencies. They have come through Category 1 hurricanes without damage. Since 1994, I have never observed any cold damage, but in the 1989 freeze palms at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden were 95 percent burned but later recovered. They are only moderately susceptible to lethal yellowing.

There are three varieties commonly available in South Florida. All are salt tolerant and are best planted in full sun.

- *Dictyosperma album* (without variety listed) have crownshafts which tend to be green or grey. This is the largest and fastest growing of the varieties. I have one specimen seven years old which is 10 feet tall with nine foot fronds. The stem is 8.5 inches in diameter at waist height (See Figure 2 on page 2).
- *D. album var. rubrum* has a reddish brown crownshaft with bronze colored emergent leaves. The stem measures eight inches in diameter at waist height and the fronds measure seven feet long. After 15 years of growth, the palm is 25 feet tall (See Figure 1 on page 2).
- *D. album var. furfuracea* (or sometimes labeled *furfuraceum*) is the most sought after variety. It is similar in size to *D. album var. rubrum* but the leaf tips remain joined even in mature fronds. This is a very unique and striking feature. The leaflets are also more of a velvety blue green color (See Figures 3 & 4 on page 2). Some plants offered for sale labeled *furfuracea* may not be true to form

– they may have more or less leaf tip joining or leafletcolor variation – but don't let that deter you from buying these plants. I have one with the most striking emerald green leaves (see front cover) and another with bronze emergent leaves. I believe all offspring from this variety are most desirable even though some crossing may alter appearance. This variety is on my top five pinnate palm list for growing in Palm Beach County.



Dictyosperma album var. furfuracea with emerald green fronds.



Figure 1: *Dictyosperma album var. rubrum*



Figure 2: *Dictyosperma album*



Figures 3 & 4: *Dictyosperma album var. furfuracea* with blue green fronds and joined leaf tips



Rusty the chicken admiring the rooster tail inflorescence of *Dictyosperma album*