

GROWING *Guihaia argyrata* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Guihaia argyrata is a short palmate palm native to southern China and northern Vietnam. It grows on steep limestone slopes up to an elevation of 3000'. It grows in the shade under a canopy of trees or it grows in full sun in exposed areas.

G. argyrata was originally named *Trachycarpus argyratus* in 1982. In 1985 it was transferred into a newly established genus named *Guihaia*. This palm is closely related to *Rhapis*. I remember an account that the first commercial shipment of *G. argyrata* seeds to South Florida were actually sold as *Rhapis*.

G. argyrata has short or subterranean stems which, with age, may creep along the ground. This palm clusters with age but may be solitary for quite some time. Stems typically measure 2" in diameter and max out at 1-1/2' tall. *G. argyrata* is dioecious with separate male and female plants. Fruit matures from green to a blue-black color. Black leaf sheath fibers cover the stem. The fibers are coarse, stiff, and form upright spines.

Leaves are truly palmate without a costa. They can measure up to 3' across. Unlike most palmate fronds seen in South Florida, the leaflets are reduplicate or are shaped like an inverted V. *G. argyrata* holds 14-26 deeply divided deep green leaflets. Rarely, leaves can be undivided or divided into 2 segments. A prominent vein runs down the center of the leaflets. The lower surface of the leaf is either white or bronze colored. The petioles are smooth.

G. argyrata is relatively new to South Florida. Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) first planted these palms in 1989. Palms at FTBG grew vigorously. They felt at home growing on the limestone substrate. The palms quickly grew 4-5' tall measured to the top of the fronds and then they began to clump. Unfortunately when the clump of stems developed the individual character of a solitary stem was lost. The palms became a tangle of crossing stems. These palms are still attractive in my opinion. The pinwheel fronds with the bronze underside look quite unique. The palms at FTBG are planted both in full sun and in partial shade. Both exposures seem to suit this palm. The palms at FTBG survived the 1989 Christmas freeze when temperatures dropped to 27° on two consecutive nights. This palm has been reported to survive temperatures as low as 18°.

We have two *G. argyrata* planted in our garden. The oldest palm was planted in our native sand in the shade 16 years ago. This location is in a low area which is periodically inundated after repeated heavy rainfall. Our younger specimen, 13 years old, was planted in full sun in shell rock on an elevated area which never floods. Both of our specimens have grown slowly. They are both about the same size, about 3' tall overall. Clumping has not yet begun, so both palms are a perfectly symmetrical display of radiating pinwheel leaves. The dark green fronds with bronze undersides really put on a show when the wind blows.

G. argyrata doesn't seem to mind occasional flooding and it is reported to be drought tolerant. It grows well in sun or shade. It is cold hardy to zone 8B. *G. argyrata* grows equally well in sandy and shell rock soil. With recommended fertilization it has never developed micronutritional deficiencies. The slow growth rate in Palm Beach County is a bonus. It appears that clumping is delayed when not grown on solid limestone, so we can appreciate perfectly formed solitary palms for many years. *G. argyrata* doesn't take up much space, so it can fit into a small, garden plan. Its short stature will insure that the attractive, pinwheel fronds are always displayed at eye level.

G. argyrata is not commonly offered for sale in South Florida. There is an abundance of fruit being produced at FTBG, so maybe we'll see some nurseries offer this palm at our local sales.



Guihaia argyrata—16 years old in the Beck garden



Guihaia argyrata—leaf underside



Guahaia argyrata—27 years old at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden



Guahaia argyrata—immature fruit



Guihaia argyrata -stem spines



Orchids love growing on skinny palms



Guihaia argyrata—reduplicate leaves