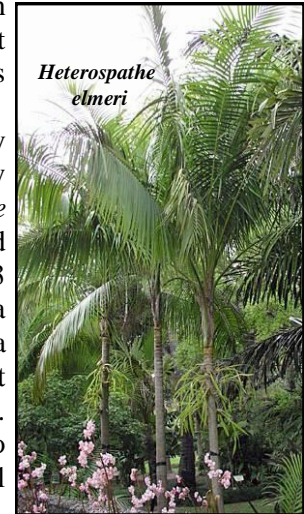


GROWING *Heterospathe elmeri* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Heterospathe elmeri is a small to medium palm endemic to Camiguin Island in the Philippines. It is a monoecious palm with pinnate fronds. In habitat it grows in dense lowland forest, trunks reportedly grow to 25 feet, and fronds grow 10 to 12 feet long

Heterospathe elmeri was offered for sale at Fairchild's Membership Day in 2009. I was not familiar with this palm but I bought one because it was very attractive in the pot and I was trying to build up my collection of *Heterospathe* species. I've never seen this palm offered for sale before or after, but Fairchild had a large inventory for sale in 2009. It was a well grown specimen in a 3 gallon pot so I immediately planted it in the ground on mounded soil in a partially shaded location. This palm adapted well to our sandy soil and is a strong grower. Palm literature lists this species as "extremely slow growing," but our specimen is now 8 feet in overall height just after 1 ½ years in the ground. The fronds are very dark green and measure 5 feet long. The leaflets closest to the stem are limp and pendent, hanging straight down. This is a very tropical feature similar to *Aphandra natalia* which we saw on our trip to Ecuador.



The *Heterospathe* most commonly grown in Florida is *H. elata*. These were the palms planted in the Mounts Botanical Garden parking lot that were replaced by *Wodyetia bifurcata* in 2009. When fertilized and irrigated, *H. elata* is a handsome palm but it does tend to show some potassium deficiency in the coldest months. In comparison, *H. elmeri* stays very dark green throughout the year and showed no signs of cold damage in our past record cold winters. It is a smaller palm with shorter fronds and a narrower stem. It appears the stem will emerge in the 4 to 5 inch diameter range as compared to the 7 inch diameter of *H. elata*.

Of the many *Heterospathe* species we have in our garden, *H. elmeri* is my favorite. Its dark green fronds with its pendent leaflets give this palm a very tropical look. It appears well adapted to our sandy soils when given regular fertilization and irrigation. The cold tolerance of this palm is surprising when you consider how close to the Equator it grows in habitat. Seek out this palm if you can find it. It is a real standout.



Heterospathe elmeri growing in the Beck garden.

(Photo by Charlie Beck)