

GROWING
Johannesteijsmannia sp.
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Don Bittel

The Tender Tropicals: The “Joey” Palms

In this series, I have focused on the spectacular palms that are also tender to grow. Arguably the most spectacular of all are the “Joey” palms, which are also not as tender as the others that have been covered.

“Joey” is an easy to pronounce nickname for the genus *Johannesteijsmannia*. It is pronounced just as it is spelled, but it still is quite a mouthful. Most growers and collectors just use the name *Joey*, as I will do for this article. The genus *Joey* consists of four species of palms endemic to Indonesia, Malaysia, and southern Thailand. *Joey altifrons* and *Joey magnifica* are commonly available as seedlings. *Joey lanceolata* and *Joey perakensis* are very rare and have never been commercially available.

All of the *Joey* palms are beautiful palms, because of their large, simple and entire leaves. The leaves are diamond shaped, dark green, and pleated. *Joey magnifica* has silver undersides to its leaf, making it even more gorgeous. The leaves vary from different localities, but can reach sizes of 10 feet long by six feet wide, on a six foot petiole. The average size is about six feet long by three feet wide. There can be up to 30 leaves in a big rosette, which makes for an impressive cluster. We may never grow these palms to that size in Florida, but they are still very impressive as smaller plants.

The *Joey* palms do not form trunks above ground (except in *Joey perakensis*). This makes them ideal for potted specimens. They like deep, rich soil, and need to be in a pot that looks too large for the plant. They grow much faster if well watered and fertilized often. They are fairly slow growing, and resent being disturbed, so a larger pot will keep them from needing repotting as often also. The *Joey* palms are not as tender as you would expect from their tropical origins. I have not had any problems leaving mine outside when the temperatures get close to freezing. They will probably withstand a light freeze in a pot, and maybe lower if planted in the ground and protected. They require shade, since they are understory palms and do not grow in full sun.

The name *Johannesteijsmannia* comes from the 19th century Dutch botanist, Johannes Teijsmann. *Altifrons* means with tall fronds, and of course *magnifica* means magnificent. The old genus name was *Teysmannia* named after S.E. Teysmann. The leaves of the *Joey* palms are used as thatch for roofs in the areas where it grows. The nurseries in Thailand are growing these palms by the thousands, so hopefully it will never become endangered in its native habitat.

We are indeed fortunate that these most beautiful of all palms can be grown in South Florida and do not need the pampering that some of the other tender tropicals need during our short but sometimes deadly cold snaps. So try growing these “Joey” palms: they are definitely worth the wait!

Note: In 1999, Don Bittel wrote a series of articles regarding tender tropicals that were published in the Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society’s Palm & Cycad Times. This article is a reprint of one article from this series that was published in the December 1999 issue.

Joey altifrons auction plant



5 year old *Joey altifrons* in the Beck garden

