

GROWING *Kentiopsis oliviformis* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Kentiopsis oliviformis is one of the most distinctive pinnate palms. It is easy to identify due to its 10 foot long fronds that form an upright “feather duster” crown similar to many *Attalea sp.* which are much larger and *Rhopalostylis sp.* which grow so well in California but do not grow well here in Palm Beach County. Its green crownshaft can approach 3 feet long. From the lower leaf tips, 3 to 5 foot reins hang gracefully. Stems can exceed one foot in diameter.

Kentiopsis is endemic to New Caledonia. However, it is threatened due to agricultural expansion and unfortunately does not occur in protected reserves. In habitat, it grows from sea level up to an elevation of 1000 feet. It is often found growing along seasonal water courses but is also found growing in dry situations. It is reported to grow 100 feet tall in habitat but I have never seen one taller than 35 feet in South Florida.

Back in 1997, *Kentiopsis oliviformis* was nearly impossible to obtain. At that time, I obtained my first seedling from Louis Hooper, a well-known palm enthusiast from California. The seed was collected from habitat in New Caledonia. This palm has grown 25 feet of wood on a 1 foot diameter trunk (waist level). The trunk flares considerably at ground level. Nine years ago I planted several more specimens which have grown 9 feet of wood and all have performed well in our garden. As with many palms in nature, it typically germinates in the shade and then emerges as a canopy palm, but I have had great success planting three gallon specimens directly in sun. This palm is well adapted to Palm Beach County and even outgrows specimens planted in tropical areas. Don Hodel reports in his book, *Palms of New Caledonia*, that after 18 years from seed, his palms have only 6 feet of wood in Tahiti and Venezuela.

Grow this beautiful, self-cleaning palm because of its unique form, rapid growth, and high degree of hurricane resistance.



Kentiopsis oliviformis planted 9 years ago
in the Beck garden.



Kentiopsis oliviformis inflorescence