

GROWING
Licuala naumannii
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Licuala naumannii is a small, solitary palm native to Bougainville Island located off the coast of Papua New Guinea. This palm has circular palmate leaves which are divided into wedge shaped segments with the apical segment much wider than the rest. In habitat this palm can grow to a height of 15-30 feet. *L. naumannii* is commonly misspelled with one “n” on the internet. Kew Royal Botanical Garden does recognize *L. naumannii* as a valid name.

L. naumannii grows in coastal rainforest near mangrove habitat. Bougainville Island is in the tropics, located 6 degrees south of the equator. You would think that this palm might be too tender to grow in Palm Beach County’s sub-tropical climate, but that is not the case. We planted our specimen in 2008, one year before our record cold winters of 2009 and 2010. The long cold spells experienced in those two seasons had little effect on our recently planted palm. Our garden is located 4 miles from the coast just north of Boynton Beach, so planting in colder areas has not been tested to my knowledge. I did see a beautiful specimen of *L. naumannii* growing in Jeff Searle’s garden 16.5 miles from the coast, west of Davie, FL. I’m not sure if that palm was planted out prior to 2009, but I assume it was based on its size.

With recommended fertilization and regular irrigation, our specimen has never developed a nutritional deficiency. Our specimen is planted in a low lying, shady area which occasionally floods after heavy rain. Considering that this palm’s native habitat is mangrove swamp, it’s not a surprise that it grows well in this situation.

L. naumannii has a footprint 4’ across. Our 8 year old specimen holds 12 healthy, stiff, dark green leaves which measure 28” across. Vertical growth is slow. A stem is beginning to form and it measures 3” in diameter.

In our society’s October 2009 newsletter, Paul Craft stated “Although *L. naumannii* is untested in South Florida, I believe it shows great promise as a landscape plant.” After 8 years of growing this palm, I can highly recommend it. It is a hard palm to find, but you should add this little gem to your list of “must have” palms. There are many *Licuala* species untested in Palm Beach County. Many will not successfully grow here, but *L. naumannii* is a proven winner. Availability of *L. naumannii* is not good, but seed sources are available.



Licuala naumannii in the Beck garden





Licuala naumannii in Jeff Searle's garden.