

# GROWING *Licuala spinosa* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

*Submitted by Charlie Beck*

*Licuala spinosa* is a clumping fan palm which is widely distributed in southern Asia. It is native to Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and other island nations. In habitat it is found in low, wet areas which may be close to the coast or near river banks. It may occur in sandy or swampy organic soils. Its common name is the Mangrove Fan Palm. This palm can survive in disturbed deforested areas with full sun exposure. Even though it's native to tropical areas, it is cold hardy to zone 9b and is suitable for growing in all of Palm Beach County.

*L. spinosa* is not a new palm for our area. It was commonly available for sale 30 years ago when I moved to South Florida. It grows well in sandy, organic and alkaline soils. It grows well in deep shade or full sun. I've seen it surviving in full sun with no irrigation or fertilization. Of course it looks best in wet soil with light to full shade. We have two specimens planted in our garden. One is located in a low, moist sandy area and the other is located beside the house in shell rock right below where roof planes converge and concentrated rain runoff floods the planting bed. The one close to the house is situated in front of our living room window where we can appreciate its beauty from inside the house. Our specimens have grown at a medium rate. Our 19 year old plant in sand is 12' tall in overall height with 6 stems. The 9 year old specimen in shell rock has grown 8' tall in overall height with 6 stems. The only criticism of this palm that I could imagine is that the clump could become too dense with great age. It is easy to thin the clump of stems to any manageable number to create the desired artistic effect. This palm is not so vigorous to require more than a light thinning every 5-10 years.

The most beautiful specimens of *L. spinosa* that I have seen are growing in marl soil in Loxahatchee. Mike Harris has a fine specimen that he uses as a seed source for the plants he grows. We are lucky to have plants available that are grown from this superior specimen. Dale Holton also has an attractive specimen of *L. spinosa* growing in his swamp. Clearly this palm is at its best in marl soil.

Grow this palm for its showy pinwheel leaves and bright red fruit. It grows well in a variety of situations and is completely cold hardy in our area. With recommended fertilizer our plants have never shown any micro-nutrient deficiencies. It is easy to maintain at any height and stem density. This is a proven performer here in Palm Beach County.



*Licuala spinosa*  
at Caribbean Palms Nursery



*Licuala spinosa*  
at the Beck Garden



*Licuala spinosa*  
at Holton Nursery