

GROWING *Pseudophoenix sargentii* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck



Eight year old *Phoenix sargentii* var. *navassana* in foreground with slower growing varieties in background.

(Photo by Charlie Beck)

Pseudophoenix sargentii is one of Florida's eleven native palms. It is one of our two native palms with a crownshaft. It is easy to distinguish from the other crownshaft palm (*Roystonea regia*) which is much larger.

Pseudophoenix sargentii is a solitary, monoecious palm. It holds an open crown of pinnate leaves which can measure up to 8 feet long. The stems can grow 25 feet tall and measure up to one foot in diameter. In habitat, it is usually found along the coast in alkaline soil. The fruit is red, hence the common name "cherry palm." Another common name is "Buccaneer Palm." The crownshaft is bluish to gray-green and measures one to two feet long. This palm grows best in full sun.

There are two subspecies of *P. sargentii*. Subspecies *sargentii* is native to Florida, Mexico, and Belize. Subspecies *saonae* is native to the Bahamas, Hispaniola, and Cuba. Subspecies *saonae* is then broken down to two varieties. One of these varieties is *navassana* which is found on Navassa Island located off the coast of Haiti. This variety, *navassana*, is pictured on the front cover and is featured this month.

Why would anyone seek out this particular subspecies and variety? Fast growth is the answer. Also, the undersides of the leaves are silver. *P. sargentii* is notorious for slow growth but this variety is several times faster growing. The large palm on the front cover was planted eight years ago. The two smaller *P. sargentii* in the photo are two years younger but exhibit a much slower rate of growth. The larger palm (variety *navassana*) has a stem 4 ½ feet tall and 8 inches in diameter. The smaller specimens are years away from forming a stem. These palms seem to prefer growing in alkaline soil. The stem of variety *navassana* displays an attractive waxy coating and leaf scars are spaced 6 to 7 inches apart indicating this palm's relatively fast growth rate.

All of the varieties of *P. sargentii* are very distinctive so you can't go wrong growing any of them. I would recommend growing these in a location with alkaline soil. Usually concrete home foundations create an alkaline zone close to the house. The medium size of this palm ensures that it will never be out of scale even next to a one story house. It is wind resistant and salt tolerant. It displays showy fruit and a waxy stem. On top of all these advantages – it's native too!



Pseudophoenix sargentii var. *navassana* displaying waxy stem and widely spaced leaf scars.
(Photo by Charlie Beck)