

GROWING *Ptychosperma schefferi* IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Ptychosperma schefferi is a monoecious palm with pinnate fronds. It is native to the lowland rainforest of the island of New Guinea. It is reported to be clustering or solitary, but I have never seen a solitary specimen. It has a bulging green crownshaft which grows 20 inches long. The fronds grow 5 feet long. The showy inflorescences are orange with contrasting maroon fruit which mature to black. The stems are tightly clustered and are 2 inches in diameter.



Ptychosperma schefferi growing in the Beck garden.

(Photo by Charlie Beck)

Ptychosperma schefferi has recently become readily available and has been a featured auction plant at our monthly meetings. Our oldest specimen is 15 years old. It measures 20 feet in overall height and the stem cluster is 2 ½ feet in diameter. This palm has a steady growth rate and has never shown any cold damage in our garden since planting in 1995. It does go slightly off color in cold winters but always recovers. I am going to try a winter application of fertilizer this year to see if this remedies the slight yellowing of fronds in the coldest months. This palm grows equally well in our sandy soil as it does in Miami on limestone. Our specimens are planted in full sun but I think they would also grow well in the shade.

Of all of the dozen *Ptychosperma* species we grow in our garden, *Ptychosperma schefferi* is my favorite. Its leaflets are not as showy as *P. waitianum* or *P. burretianum* but its growth rate is much better. Unlike many clumping *Ptychosperma* species which

have sparse clumps, *P. schefferi* has an attractive dense clump of stems. It can stand alone as a specimen plant. Its appearance is close to *P. macarthurii* but its ruffled leaflets are more attractive and it's a smaller scale that doesn't require as much space as *P. macarthurii*.

Plant this palm for many of its positive attributes, manageable size, showy leaflets and infructescence, symmetrical clumping habit, and steady growth rate. It will definitely draw the attention of your neighbors.



15 year old *Ptychosperma schefferi* in the Beck garden.

(Photo by Charlie Beck)



Ptychosperma schefferi leaf detail above and infructescence below
(Photos by Charlie Beck)



Ptychosperma schefferi
immature fruit
(Photo by Charlie Beck)