

GROWING

Syagrus glaucescens

IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Syagrus glaucescens is small, solitary palm native to a restricted area of eastern Brazil. It grows at 2,200 to 4,000 foot elevation in dry, rocky terrain. This habitat is located just inside the tropics. This palm's stem grows three to five inches in diameter and can grow 15 feet tall. The three foot leaves are plumose with stiff upward pointing leaflets. The leaflets are usually silver but occasionally emerge green. The leaf bases are persistent and closely spaced in five distinct rows similar to the much larger palm *Syagrus coronata*.



Syagrus glaucescens growing in the Beck garden.

(Photo by Charlie Beck)

Syagrus glaucescens is truly a collector's palm. I've never seen this palm growing in South Florida outside of our garden. Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden reports having a single specimen. I've been told by Dr. Larry Noblick that Montgomery Botanical Center does have a collection of this rare palm.

We were lucky to obtain our specimen years ago from Paul Craft. It basically was a sprouted seed at that time. In 1994, I planted our specimen in full sun in an area that rarely floods. At that time, I did not know what to expect of this palm. None of the books available in 1994 listed this palm. In 1995, "Field Guide to the Palms of the America's" listed the palm but no photograph was available. In 2003, a photograph of *Syagrus glaucescens* in habitat that was taken by Paul Craft was included in "An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms." (See plates 846 and 847 if you have access to this book.)

Our 17 year old specimen has a 12 inch tall stem. The leaves measure three feet long. It has been producing seeds for several years. Its flowers are unusually large, almost one inch long, and have a creamy yellow color. Sometimes fronds emerge silver just like a *Bismarckia* but other times the waxy leaf coat is reduced and the fronds are greener. The leaf bases are closely spaced and are quite attractive with five distinct rows. This palm will be a real show stopper once it grows a little taller. I plan to propagate this palm and make it available at our Society's auctions.

This palm was unaffected by our past record cold winters. It has never shown any nutritional deficiencies. It is a slow but steady grower. Plant this "collector" palm if you can find it. Its small size will fit into any garden. It requires full sun and will reward you with stiff silver leaflets and a stem with a very interesting leaf base pattern.



Syagrus glaucescens
infructescence

(Photo by Charlie Beck)



ABOVE: Distinctive leaf base pattern of *Syagrus glaucescens*

BELOW: *Syagrus glaucescens* leaf detail

(Photos by Charlie Beck)



Syagrus glaucescens inflorescence

(Photo by Charlie Beck)