

GROWING
Syagrus schizophylla
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

Syagrus schizophylla has a long history of name changes. Its previous genus classifications were *Cocos*, *Calappa*, *Arikuryroba*, and *Arikury*. Its common name is the Arikury Palm.

S. schizophylla is a small to medium sized palm. It's similar in size to the common *Adonidia merrillii* (Christmas Palm). Its pinnate fronds are held on upright, colorful petioles which have fibrous, serrated margins. The persistent petioles form a distinctive pattern on the stem. The regularly arranged leaflets are rigid and are held in a single plain. This is a solitary (rarely clustering) palm with an ultimate height of 13' (in nature). Stems measure 4 to 6" in diameter. Being monoecious, a single palm can produce viable seed. Globose fruit measure about 1" long and mature to a red-orange color. The endosperm is reported to be edible and taste like coconut.

S. schizophylla is native to the Atlantic coastline of Brazil. Native habitat ranges between the tropical latitudes of 10°S and 20°S. Much of its habitat extends along the ocean, so salt tolerance and wind resistance are high. Average annual rainfall in habitat is 60" which is similar to the 62" we receive in Palm Beach County (PBC). Native soils are similar to our sandy soil in PBC. This palm is frequently found growing on sand dunes. Habitat elevations range from sea level to low hills. This palm is most often found growing with full exposure to the sun. Considering its harsh native habitat, it's not surprising that it can survive planting in harsh situations or thrive in pampered home gardens.

We planted three *S. schizophylla* 23 years ago. That was the first year our garden was established. The three specimens were originally planted in full sun, but are presently growing under the canopy of taller, faster growing palms. They looked great with both light exposures. The fronds do lengthen a bit when grown in shade. This is not a fast growing palm, although it is a steady grower. This allows you appreciate its upright crown of leaves close to the ground. Our palms measure 19' tall in overall height, and 11' tall to the lowest green fronds. An attractive pattern of leaf bases persist. Petioles transition from dark brown at the stem to green by the leaflets. Our palms have set fruit for years. Seeds do sprout beneath the palms but not to the extent of being weedy. I haven't observed wildlife transporting seeds all over the garden.

With recommended fertilization and regular irrigation, our palms have never indicated any micro-nutritional deficiency. Ruth Sallenbach has many beautiful specimens thriving in her garden with once a year fertilization. I've seen *S. schizophylla* planted in harsh conditions and those palms looked acceptable, so this is clearly not a high maintenance palm.

Even though *S. schizophylla* grows in habitat on well drained sandy situations, our palms have been occasionally inundated for weeks at a time after repeated heavy rainfall. Our palms took those conditions in stride without any apparent negative effect.

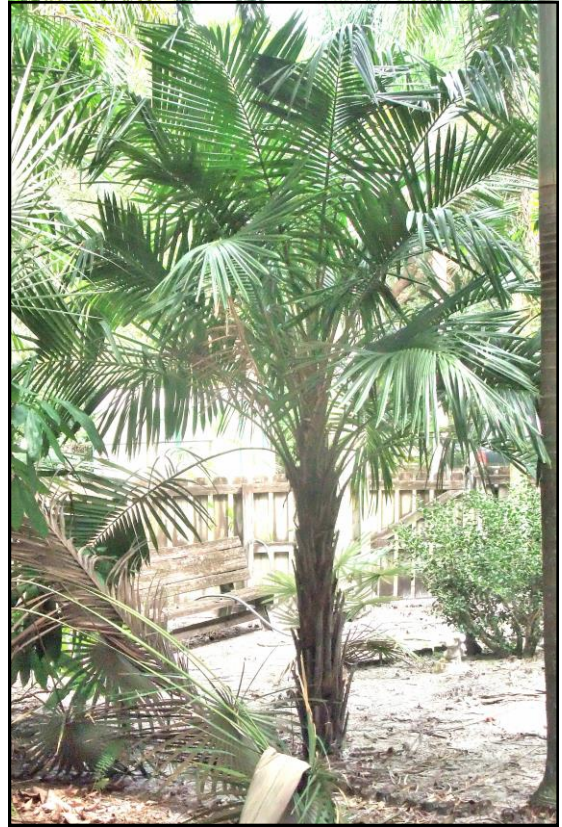
Considering this palm's tropical origin, you might assume that it is cold sensitive, but that is not the case. This palm is successfully grown in Central Florida and Southern California. I've never seen any damage due to winter cold spells. It should be cold hearty anywhere in PBC.

S. schizophylla was more commonly planted 30 years ago in PBC. It was often planted in commercial settings. Shopping center parking lots and office building landscapes often included

specimens of this tough little palm. This palm would be an excellent choice for roadside planting. It has a lot of positive attributes: medium size, light and moisture adaptable, and ability to survive unfertile sandy soil. It might be time to add this distinctive palm to your home landscape.



Susan Cioci lends scale to *Syagrus schizophylla*
in Ruth Sallenbach's Garden



Syagrus schizophylla
in Ruth Sallenbach's Garden



Syagrus schizophylla petioles in the Beck Garden



Syagrus schizophylla
23 years old in the Beck Garden