

## The Identity of *Rhapis arundinacea*

The genus *Rhapis* is native to south-eastern Asia, but William Aiton described *Rhapis arundinacea* in *Hortus Kewensis* 3: 474, 1789, stating that it was a native "of Carolina" introduced to England in 1765 through the agency of Mr. John Cree. The species is listed as a synonym of *Rhapidophyllum hystrix*, the needle palm of the southeastern United States, in Dahlgren's *Index of American Palms* (1936) and in Glassman's *Revision of B. E. Dahlgren's Index of American Palms* (1972). Were this truly so, the epithet *arundinacea* would have to replace the later epithet *hystrix*, which was not published until 1814.

In 1963, I examined the type specimen of *Rhapis arundinacea* (Fig. 1) which is preserved in the British Museum (Natural History). The specimen represents an aberrant, early-flowering, ju-

venile plant which compares well with *Sabal minor* so far as inflorescence and flowers are concerned, but not with *Rhapidophyllum hystrix* or *Serenoa repens*, also from the southeastern United States. The name *Rhapis arundinacea*, therefore, should appear as a synonym of *Sabal minor*, and the familiar name *Rhapidophyllum hystrix* remains the correct one for the needle palm.

Although Aiton did not mention the fact, the name *Rhapis arundinacea* and a more elaborate description appear in the younger Linnaeus' unpublished manuscript on palms which is now in the library of the Linnaean Society in London. A discrepancy between the habitat "Carolina" given by Aiton and that of "Florida orientali" which appears on the type specimen is perhaps explainable as an abbreviation of the information provided by Linnaeus, who wrote "Habitat in Carolina Australi America: Florida orientali."

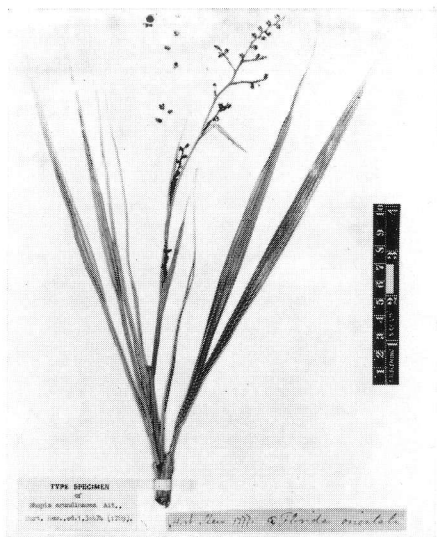
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## Impact

In January, 1931, a 1925 Lincoln four-door sedan ran into a young royal palm in my father's yard in Orchid, Florida. At the time, the palm had about five feet of trunk from the bottom of the leaf bases to the ground where it hit the tree.

The bumper injured the tree sufficiently that within several months two rotten holes developed side by side. The rotten material was chiseled out leaving two holes about the size of a man's two fists held together and about five inches deep. These were filled with concrete.

Enclosed are four photographs of this tree as it now appears 44 years later. The first photo is a picture of the tree



1. Photograph of type specimen of *Rhapis arundinacea*, courtesy of the British Museum (Natural History). Positions of label, script, and scale have been modified from the original.