

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Acrocomia (ak ro kó mee a) is derived from the Greek words *akros* (highest, at the farthest point or extreme) plus *kome* (hair or tuft), which combination suggests the stately crown of pinnate leaves born at the summit of the columnar trunk so characteristic of this genus of palms.

Calamus (kál a mus), the largest genus of palms, is made up mostly of climbers, all native in the Old World tropics and subtropics. The light, tough, reed-like stems clamber into the tallest trees by means of special adaptations in the form of hooked spines. Some of the species yield rattan. The generic name is the Latin word *calamus* (reed, cane) which was derived from the Greek *kalamos* (reed).

Chamaerops (ka mée rawps) is a genus of palms whose members are commonly humble and shrub-like in habit of growth. The technical name is a compound of the Greek words *chamai* (low, on the ground) and *rhops* (a bush or shrub).

Cocos (kó kos), a monotypic genus as now understood, includes only the coconut palm, *Cocos nucifera*. The generic name was established by Linnaeus as a feminine singular noun, though the term is derived from the Portuguese and Spanish masculine substantive *coco* (coconut palm). *Coco* is a modern Romance language form of Latin *coccum* (berry, kernel), which in its turn evolved from the Greek word *kokkos* (berry, seed). The final *s* of *Cocos* reflects the original Greek termination; it is a Hellenization which effects correspondence with other Greek generic names ending in *-os*; for example: *Diospyros*, *Strychnos*, *Symplocos*, *et al.*

Corypha (ko ryé fa) is a genus of

massive fan palms especially noteworthy for the spectacular inflorescence which towers well above the crown. This flowering and fruiting occurs only once, after which the palm dies. The technical name is derived from the Greek *koryphé* (summit, peak), thereby denoting the area of this unique feature.

Mascarena (mask a rée na) is a genus created by L. H. Bailey for three species of palms, two of which (*M. lagenicaulis*, the bottle palm and *M. Verschaffeltii*, the spindle palm) are rather widely cultivated in tropic lands. The generic name is a neo-Latin formation after the Mascarene Islands in the Indian Ocean, the native habitat of these palms.

Pelagodoxa (pel ago dóck sa), a small genus of palms found growing in dense shade in their native haunts near waterfalls and streams which provide them with a high humidity. One species (*P. Henryana*) is native to several volcanic islands of the Marquesas group, and another (*P. mesocarpa*) is believed to be indigenous to the Philippine Islands. The generic name is a combination of the Greek words *pelagos* (the sea) and *doxa* (praise, glory). The Latin form *pelagus*, derived from the original Greek term, not only denoted the sea but also came to designate any swift stream or torrent of water. This semantic shift is of importance to our understanding of these palms, for those that have been under cultivation near the sea have not survived.

Opsiandra (op si án dra), is composed of the Greek words *opsis* (sight, appearance) and *aner, andra* (man, male), suggesting the fact that the male flowers persist for months on the inflorescence after the female flowers have already developed into fruits. Those generic names terminating in *-andra*, despite their masculine derivation, are treated as

feminine in their Latinized form; hence adjectives modifying such generic names carry the Latin feminine ending: *Ptychandra glauca*. As now defined, the genus *Opsiandra* comprises but one species, the *Opsiandra Maya*. The specific epithet *Maya* is not an adjective in this case, but a proper noun (hence capitalized) which stands in apposition to the generic term.

Rhapidophyllum (rap i do fill um) is a monotypic genus established in 1876 by H. Wendland and O. Drude for *Rhapido-phyllum hystrix*, a species which ranges from South Carolina to central Florida and westward into Alabama. The so-called needle palm, blue palmetto, creeping palmetto, or vegetable porcupine was first discovered growing near Savannah, Georgia by John Fraser and was given the name *Chamaerops hystrix* by Frederick Pursh. Subsequently it was shunted to *Sabal*, *Corypha*, and *Rhapis*. The current generic term is a compound of the Greek words *rhapidos* (a rod) and *phyllon* (leaf) in allusion to the numerous long, slender, needle-like structures in the leaf-sheath. The specific epithet *hystrix* is the Greek word for hedgehog — lest we should forget that this humble fan palm is formidably armed. In botanical literature one occasionally finds the word written with an initial capital: *Hystrix*. Inasmuch as the name is not a proper noun honoring an individual, nor does it commemorate a former generic name, there is no valid reason for this capitalization.

Zombia (zâhm bee a) is a generic name established by L. H. Bailey. It is a vernacular name for which Dr. Bailey held no affection, but evocative it is with its overtones of black magic and Haitian voodoo sorcery. A zombi has been defined as a dead body, soulless but able to walk, act, and move about as if it were

alive. The single species comprising the genus (*Zombia antillarum*) is a dwarfish fan palm which forms a clump and one or several stems to a height of ten feet. These trunks are covered over with a loose sleeve of open-woven structure and beset with rows of formidable spines. The palm, found growing on high slopes in very hot, dry areas, is known to the Haitians as *latanier zombi*, the word *latanier* being employed to denote any fan-leaved palm. One has only to fancy this palm in the barren setting of its natural habitat with a bright moon playing on its features to comprehend something of the eerie phantasmagoria that could pass in the minds of those who know little of our scientific age and its no-nonsense attitudes.

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News of the Society

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Slide Collection

The Society's slide collection is now ready to travel to local groups for showing at their meetings. The rules are simple: ask for slides well in advance of your meeting date, so they may be reserved for you at that time; send a deposit of \$10.00, which will be returned when the slides are sent back to headquarters; send them back immediately after the showing, as others may be waiting for them. A brief commentary goes with the slides. Suggestions for improvement are welcomed, and new, better slides are received with gratitude.

Palm Seeds

The Seed Bank has been greatly helped in distributing seeds by the staffs of Fairchild Tropical Garden and of the Alvin R. Jennings estate. These two palm collections contain hundreds of mature palms, many of them producing