

PALM LITERATURE

SEED TO ELEGANCE. KENTIA PALMS OF NORFOLK ISLAND, SOUTH PACIFIC. Kevin Williams. Studio Monarch, Norfolk Island 2899, South Pacific. 2007. ISBN 978-0-9775121-1-9. US\$24.95.

In this attractive little book (available via www.kentiapalmbook.com), Kevin Williams tells the story of the part played by Norfolk Island and its residents in the kentia palm's rise from obscurity to ubiquity. The kentia palm, *Howea forsteriana* from Lord Howe Island, is nowadays an extremely important horticultural commodity on account of its ease of cultivation and tolerance of temperate conditions. A substantial proportion of the kentia market is supplied by Lord Howe Island via a nursery run by the island's governing board, but in this book Williams advises us that a startling 60% or more of world demand is in fact met by plantations on Norfolk Island. The scale of seed and seedling export, and of downstream palm production described by Williams demonstrates that the kentia is very big business indeed.

The book provides an outline of Norfolk Island's sometimes brutal history and its close links with the infamous HMS Bounty mutineers. Williams then goes on to explain how the kentia became so popular in Victorian horticulture and a favorite of British royalty. In outlining the origins of the Norfolk Island kentia plantations, the author explains how kentia seeds from Lord Howe were traded for

Norfolk Island pine seeds (*Araucaria heterophylla*). The pines are now well established on Lord Howe, no doubt providing valuable timber over the years and are popular with the local seabirds, especially terns, for nesting, but ironically are becoming invasive and require some controlling – they are certainly not the cash crop that kentia has become on Norfolk Island! The book concludes with a detailed description of kentia production methods and distribution, and guidance on the use and cultivation of the palm.

Kevin Williams has provided a very informative summary of the Norfolk Island kentia story, richly illustrated with excellent photos, including wonderful archive material, and elegantly formatted for an easy read. It will be of interest to all IPS members, especially those gardening in cooler areas. There is little to criticize. I spotted a few botanical blips, such as the capitalization of the species epithet, which should of course be lower case. And do my eyes deceive me, or is the clustering palm in the elegant Washington salon on p. 27 (and on the website) not *Dypsis lutescens*? But these are trivial points. The only real disappointment for me is the fact that the much more elegant curly palm (*Howea belmoreana*) has not become as popular in commercial horticulture as its more amenable sister species. One day perhaps...?

WILLIAM J. BAKER
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**TROPICAL PLANT
& SEED LOCATORS**

Adenium obesum - Desert Rose
Bismarckia nobilis - Bismarck Palm
Chambeyronia macrocarpa
 Red Feather Palm
Hyophorbe lagenicaulis - Bottle Palm
Ravenea rivularis - Majesty Palm
Wodyetia bifurcata - Foxtail Palm

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