

LETTERS

JENSEN BEACH, FLA. Feb. 17, 1962

Please find enclosed a snapshot of a *Sabal* palm. Is it usual for this type of palm to twist itself around another tree or object?

This snapshot was taken three years ago west of Palm Beach. I gave the negative to Mr. Edwin A. Menninger, "The Flowering Tree Man" of Stuart who remarks that it's a fine addition to the freaks.

Sincerely,
A. J. WHITE

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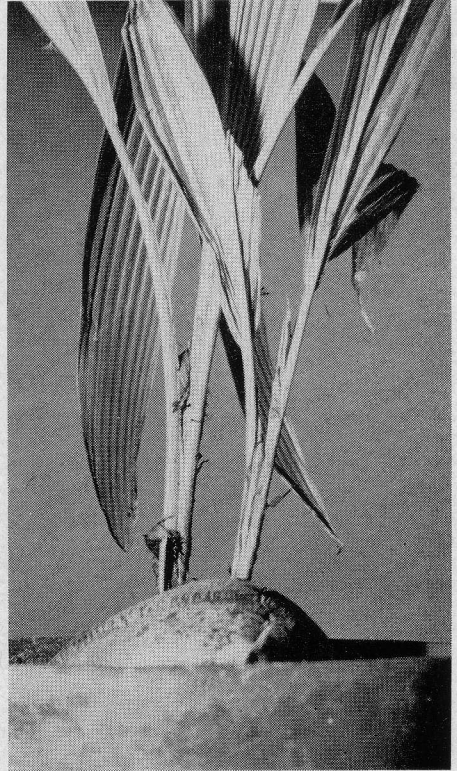
STUART, FLA., Feb. 2, 1962

The enclosed photograph of a two-timing coconut is unusual enough that I thought you might like it for your collection.

Sincerely yours,
EDWIN A. MENNINGER

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Ceroxylon (ser óx i lawn) is composed of the Greek words *keros* (wax) and *xylon* (wood), in allusion to the layer of wax which encases the trunks of these extremely lofty pinnate palms native in the heights of the Andes in northern South America. One species, the *C. alpinum* (formerly *C. andicola*), is reported to thrive at an altitude of 10,000 feet. Attempts to grow these South American wax palms in the low elevation of Florida and California have failed, but it has been suggested that the palms might be given a trial in some of the heights of California, Oregon or Washington state. Imagine a drive from sequoias to ceroxylons all within a day! The Latin specific epithet *alpinum* originally conveyed the restricted sense of "Alpine, pertaining to the Alps Mountains" but, by extension, the adjective came to be applied to any towering peak or mountain range, synonymous for all purposes with the more prosaic *montanum*.



66. A "two-timing" coconut.

Copernicia (ko per nish ee a) was created by Martius to honor the memory of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), the Polish astronomer whose heliocentric theory of the movements of the earth and planets supplanted the older geocentric Ptolemaic system. His theory was brought to full fruition decades later by Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler. The numerous *Copernicia* species are handsome palmate palms of the New World tropics with a particularly diversified representation on the island of Cuba. A Brazilian species, the *C. cerifera*, is the famed carnauba wax palm which is grown commercially in vast groves and furnishes one of the world's most useful natural waxes.

Daemonorops (dee máwn o rawps), a large genus of very spiny, climbing

feather palms, is basically a combination of the Greek *daimon* (a deity) and *rhops* (bush). These plants with their slender, pliable stems have been referred to as "Sumatran rattan palms", but the range of their native habitat extends from mainland tropical Asia southeastward into Indonesia, of which Sumatra itself is but one component. In Bailey's *Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture*, the article on *Daemonorops* contributed by Jared G. Smith and revised by Norman Taylor explains that the technical name "probably means *God-like, of divine appearance*." Certainly no one will dispute the poetic appeal of this interpretation, but the Greek word *daimon* became *daemon* in its Latinized form and denoted an evil or malignant spirit. In truth, the generic term as compounded by Karl Blume simply means "demon bush" in unmistakable reference to the sharp spines characteristic of the genus. To the ancient Greeks, a *daimon* was an unpersonified divinity in the form of a supernatural power. Plato explained that each man might have his own *daimon*, good or evil, which acted as an intermediary between him and the gods he worshipped. Typically, the Romans reduced this Hellenic subtlety to the baser notion inherent in *daemon*. The Bible has occasional references to the casting out of devils, and during the Middle Ages the mentally ill were thought to be possessed by demons. But before we laud our own sophistication in such matters, let us recall that at least nineteen "witches" were either

hanged or pressed to death in Salem, Massachusetts as late as 1692!

Elaeis (ee lée iss) is derived from the Greek *elaia* (olive tree, olive). Both the Classical Latin *oliva* and *olea* found in the writings of Virgil and Pliny are doublets derived from the Greek word, but Jacquin, who established our palm genus, returned to the original Greek form, Latinized the diphthong ai to ae and appended the -is to effect correspondence with other generic terms ending in -is; for example: *Iris*, *Eucharis*, *Amaryllis*, *Pteris*, et al. A commercial oil used in making candles and soap is extracted from the fruit pulp and also from the seed kernels of the *Elaeis guineensis*, popularly known as the African oil palm.

Gaussia (gáw see a), a genus comprising but two species as now understood, the *G. princeps* of Cuba and the *G. attenuata* native to Puerto Rico, was erected by Hermann Wendland to honor Karl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855), German scientist ranked with Archimedes and Newton as one of the three foremost mathematicians in history.

Scheelea (shé lee a), a genus comprising about 40 species of American palms with very long, stiffly ascending pinnate leaves, was founded by Karsten to honor Karl Wilhelm Scheele (1742-1786), a German-born chemist who worked most of his life in Sweden. He is credited with the discovery of the elements of chlorine, barium, and manganese.

BRUCE H. BEELER

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