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PALM BRIEF

Acrocomia Naturalized in Central Florida

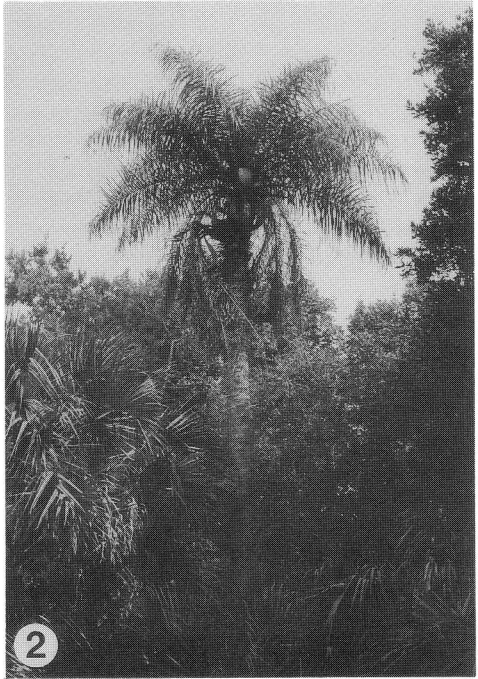
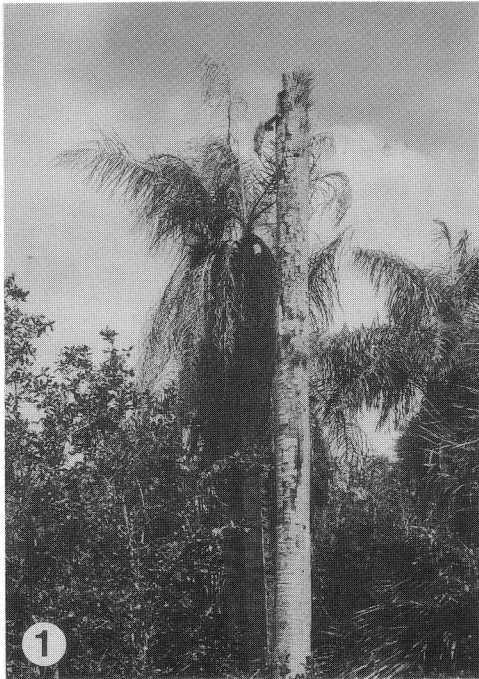
In a wooded area near Cocoa in east central Florida a small stand of *Acrocomia* palms is thriving and reproducing on its own. This community currently consists of eight mature trees, several juvenile plants, and numerous seedlings. They are probably *Acrocomia totai*, since even the young seedlings have not been damaged by sustained temperatures in the low 20° F.

At one time a house stood on the property, so presumably the original palm on the site was planted by man. The house has been gone for many years, but the

Acrocomia palms seem to be very much at home. The original plant died several years ago after attaining a height of approximately fifty feet; the remaining trees represent two additional generations.

Although these *Acrocomia* palms are obviously well adapted to Florida's climate, they are rarely seen, and are usually not available in nurseries. The difficulty of propagating species of *Acrocomia*, along with their spiny nature probably explains their scarcity.

It is unfortunate that *Acrocomia* palms are not used more often in landscape plantings; they are rapid growers once they have germinated, they transplant easily,



1. In the foreground is the trunk of the original tree, which died several years ago. Recently the top portion of the dead trunk fell and damaged the crowns of the two younger trees to the left and behind it. 2. The finest specimen of the remaining trees stands alone a short distance from the others. *Sabal palmetto* is in the foreground.



3. A third generation of *Acrocomia* are found growing on the forest floor.

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LETTERS

Dr. Natalie Uhl

The recent East Coast freeze left a trail of frozen palms and other subtropicals in Florida and along the Gulf Coast. For the third time in seven years, 100-year low temperature records were broken. In central Florida damage to *Washingtonia robusta*, though temporary, ranged from unscathed to 100% brown leaves. Temperatures in the high teens were recorded at Walt Disney World with a wind chill factor and temperatures below freezing for 24 hours that intensified the degree of injury. Many species of palms are used in the landscape and by midsummer a more reliable assessment of damage can be made.

One result of this freeze that is of particular interest, however, is the effect on the Queen Palm, *Syagrus romanzoffiana*. Of several hundred individuals of varying age and size, about 90% were burned brown, while the remainder varied from modest to negligible damage. Photographic records reveal completely green palms flanked by totally brown companions.

and are one of the most cold tolerant of pinnate leaved palms. The spines on the trunk add interest and an exotic atmosphere to the landscape, and are not a nuisance as long as the palms are planted well away from walkways and traffic areas.

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Age, shelter and cultural conditions have been considered and discounted. There may be genetic explanations, however. The late David Barry grew a small crop of Queen Palms from seed obtained from Uruguay. He considered that the species had a latitudinal range of 1,500 miles. If this is correct, those individuals farthest from the equator might be expected to tolerate lower temperatures than their sisters in Brazil, for example.

About twenty of Barry's palms found their way to Walt Disney World where, I am embarrassed to say, they were somehow lost in the shuffle of hundreds of Queen Palms. I would like to believe that the green palms to be found gracing the scene after the most recent devastating freeze are genetically different to the vast majority of the local representatives of the species.

Whatever the explanation, would it not be worth investigating the possible sources of this excellent ornamental. Florida and the Gulf Coast depend heavily on Queen Palms, but at this writing they look pretty unhappy and many have been killed. California appreciates the palm as well, and wherever it is cultivated, a hardier strain would be welcome. Because *Syagrus*