

## Palms in the Tropics

M. D. FERRERO

Nong Nooch Tropical Gardens, Km 163 Sukhumvit Hwy., Sattahip Chonburi 20250 Pattaya, Thailand

Never before have so many different palms come into the marketplace as now. This overabundance of variety has contributed to a resurgence of interest in growing palms worldwide and also has confused newcomers to the field of tropical palms! Much work has to be done with such basics as selecting desirable forms of new incoming species for horticulture and promoting them in the marketplace.

Fortunately there is a huge choice these days of smaller and compact species from countries such as Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Philippines, New Caledonia, Mexico, and Panama. These are plants that are quite content to grow permanently in pots. Many of the newer introductions are understory dwarfs, and some can truly fit in the palm of your hand, such as the Madagascar *Dypsis louvelii*, *D. moqueriesiana*, and *D. thiryana* or the Mexican *Chamaedorea tuerckheimii* and *C. sullivaniorium*, not to mention the many miniature species of *Licuala*, *Iguanura* (Fig. 1), and *Pinanga* coming in from Thailand and Indonesia.

Inevitably the time will come when you will want to change the palm you planted to another position. Various species of *Livistona* (Fig. 2), especially *L. chinensis* and *L. rotundifolia* var. *luzonensis*, make very good subjects for transplanting. All of the Ptychospermatoid genera, including *Ptychosperma*, *Ptychococcus*, *Veitchia* (including *Adonidia*), and *Wodyetia*, can tolerate transplanting extremely well, as can some species of *Areca* such as *A. triandra* and *A. catechu*. Most of the regularly cultivated robust *Dypsis* spp. from Madagascar and the Mascarene genera *Dictyosperma* and *Hyophorbe* are well known transplant subjects, as are species of *Phoenix* and the ubiquitous *Cocos nucifera*, *Elaeis guineensis*, and *Rhapis excelsa*. Some lesser known but equally tough species are *Heterospatha elata*, *Actinorhynchus calapparia*, *Pritchardia pacifica*, *Phoenicophorium borsigianum*, and *Cyrtostachys renda*. Also *Pinanga* spp., such as *P. coronata* (*P. kuhlii*) and its allies,

are very resilient to transplanting, as is *Iguanura wallichiana* and its many forms and varieties. All of the *Roystonea* and *Sabal* species transplant well, as do the cocoid genera, especially *Syagrus* and *Butia* species.

The ubiquitous *Roystonea* spp., and to a lesser extent *Elaeis guineensis*, are losing favour in Asian landscapes, because they are too large, too dirty (dropping leaves), and demand too much water and maintenance. *Wodyetia* is now establishing itself to fill this niche, and its popularity is beginning to peak throughout many Asian countries especially Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and, of late, Singapore and Philippines. Favorites such as *Cocos nucifera*, *Dypsis lutescens*, *D. leptocheilos*, *D. decaryi*, *D. madagascariensis* (*D. lucubensis*), *Rhapis excelsa*, *Ptychosperma macarthurii*, *Syagrus romanzoffiana*, and *Phoenix roebelenii* continue to enjoy success, throughout much of Asia, although in many places along the southeastern coast of Australia the latter two (along with *Cocos nucifera*) have been effectively banned from planting by local municipalities as their falling fruits and leaves are deemed hazardous.

Many Asian countries have yet to embrace their own native palms for landscaping use, with the exception of *Cyrtostachys renda*. Instead the fascination for planting exotics still remains such that *Licuala grandis*, *Ptychosperma macarthurii*, and *Dypsis lutescens* are almost over-used. It is pleasing to see palms such as *Johannesteijsmannia* spp., *Licuala peltata* var. *sumawongii* (*L. elegans* of hort.), and *Iguanura wallichiana* varieties becoming more commonplace. *Arenga pinnata* and *A. westerhoutii* are under-used, perhaps because of their gargantuan sizes and haxapanthic habits. *Caryota* species are still used but sparingly. In Thailand, much has been made of promoting the endemic *Kerriodoxa elegans* in the landscape, and it is starting to catch on. Favorites continue to be *Phoenix sylvestris* (and its hybrids), *Copernicia prunifera*, *Wodyetia*, *Syagrus schizophylla*, *Livistona rotun-*



1. Future trends in tropical palm horticulture include *Licuala mattanensis* (upper left), the compact form *Areca catechu* (upper right), the yellow form of *Adonidia merrillii* (lower left) and the many species and forms of *Iguanura*, including *I. polymorpha* (lower right). (Photos by S. Zona)





2. *Livistona rotundifolia*, shown here with ripe fruits, is one of the easiest tropical palms to transplant. (Photo by S. Zona)

*difolia* var. *luzonensis*, and *Ptychosperma* spp. In the Philippines native *Pinanga* and *Livistona* species and some of the spectacular *Heterospatha* species such as *H. scitula* and *H. philippinensis* are starting to gain acceptance as palms for the home garden, although exotic imports hold the balance of power in public landscapes. The Philippines has a reputation for its development of horticultural forms of *Dypsis lutescens* (dwarf or variegated mutants), *Hyophorbe verschaffeltii* hybrids, a chartreuse/yellow form of *Adonidia (Veitchia) merrillii* (Fig. 1), and compact forms of *Areca catechu* (Fig. 1). All of these have found favor not just in the Philippines, but are exported to neighbouring Asian countries where they are now gaining popularity.

In Australia, particularly Far North Queensland, native palms, such as *Archontophoenix*, *Wodyetia*, and *Ptychosperma* spp., are much cherished and are often found in private gardens and in public landscapes. Exotics such as *Ravenea rivularis* and *Dypsis decaryi* are losing popularity because of their low resistance to pests. In New Caledonia a groundswell of interest and support for growing the indigenous palms unique to the island is building. Some easy to grow species, such as *Chambeyronia macrocarpa*, *Cyphophoenix elegans*, *Burretiokentia hapala*, and *Kentiopsis oliviformis*, are gradually finding a place in public plantings and private gardens. It is an irony that many of New Caledonia's palms are more popularly cultivated abroad than they are at home.

Over the last few years, particularly with Madagascar beginning to be opened up by seed traders and merchants, palms such as *Beccario-phoenix*, *Ravenea glauca*, *Dypsis lastelliana*, *D. decipiens*, and *D. onilahensis* are becoming more

common in the landscapes. Papua New Guinea has contributed a myriad of *Cayptrocalyx*, *Ptychosperma*, and *Licuala* species over the last few years. Many, such as *Calyptrocalyx hollrungii*, *C. albertianus*, *C. polyphyllus*, *C. pachystachys*, and the polymorphic *C. elegans*, are becoming more sought after and used in plantings. *Ptychosperma hentyi* (from New Britain), *Heterospatha micrantha*, *Sommieria elegans*, and *Caryota* sp. "zebrina" (from Irian Jaya) are now attracting much attention in the palm collector's world and general horticulture. Strong efforts are being made to popularise and promote Indonesian palms, such as *Salacca magnifica*, *Areca catechu* (yellow variant), and *Siphokentia beuginii* for landscaping, as well as *Areca vestiaria* (red crownshaft forms) and *Licuala mattanensis* (*Licuala* sp. "Mapu") (Fig. 1) for interior gardens.

A new trend is emerging, however, and that is to put in smaller sized palms (many of them understory types) with emphasis on variety that can be attractively displayed in smaller sized plots, for gone are the days of sweeping lawns and acreages with space to fill. As we hurtle towards the new millennium people are becoming increasingly urbanised and our gardens are correspondingly becoming 'down-sized.' The good news is we shall have a multitude of compact palms coming into cultivation that will suit these lifestyles and situations.

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