

PALM LITERATURE

A POCKET GUIDE TO PALMS. Martin Gibbons. Chartwell Books, Inc, Edison, New Jersey, USA. 2003. ISBN: 0-7858-1562-7. US \$18, hard bound, color dust jacket. Pp 254.

This is an interesting little book with a curious title. At about 6 inches square, it certainly would fit in a backpack and would be useful to the world traveler who wished to carry a guide to identify the palms most likely encountered in public gardens. However, it is a highly personal selection of palms that omits many commonly seen species in favor of more unusual ones.

And that's a good thing.

The book is lavishly illustrated with generally good quality color photographs of about 200 palms and 24 cycads, although the title doesn't mention cycads and the dust jacket provides only a cursory mention. A brief introduction and a few pages on general cultivation tips do not provide any new information but considering the great variety in local growing conditions and availability of potting material across the globe, this section does provide a nice overview for the beginning palm enthusiast.

This book seems to be a collection of photos and descriptions of species favored by the author who has traveled extensively in search of palms. Approximately one quarter of the species illustrated are palms rarely seen in cultivation anywhere outside their native country, if at all. And at my count, 63 of the 200 palms in this book aren't illustrated in color elsewhere. That is what makes this book particularly valuable for palm enthusiasts. Where most books focus on the most commonly grown or best known species, the author boldly steps off that trail to describe and illustrate such interesting palms as *Bactris ferruginea*, *Ceroxylon quindiuense*, *Chamaedorea linearis*, *Desmoncus orthacanthos*, *Dictyocaryum lamarckianum*, *Geonoma orbignyana*, *Jubaeopsis caffra*, *Livistona jenkinsiana*, *Oenocarpus mapora*, *Pholidostachys dactyloides*, *Plectocomia himalayana*, *Syagrus duartei*, *Syagrus macrocarpa* and others. I particularly like the photos of the palms in habitat, because they can provide growers with visual clues regarding cultivation or landscape use.

Some of the common names for the palms shown exhibit a certain "tongue in cheek" element: *Calamus erectus* = the Viagra palm?

There are a few errors here:

Guihaia argyrata grows well in South Florida because our limestone does indeed mirror the high pH, limestone-rich soils of its native habitat. However, our soils are limestone-derived soils but coral rock is found only in the Florida Keys, where *Guihaia* is rarely grown.

Nypa fruticans occurs across the Indo-Pacific and is naturalized in West Africa and Panama.

Pinanga coronata is not cold hardy, at least in South Florida. Plants show the effects of cold damage and seedlings are prone to fungal infection at 50°F.

Pritchardia is a genus of about 25 species, not the approximately 40 mentioned by the author.

Roystonea oleracea is misspelled *R. oleraceae*.

The common names for Florida's thatch palms don't take into account the nursery trade's naming of *T. morrisii* (Silver Thatch Palm) and *T. radiata* (Green Thatch Palm) which are based on easily observable leaf characteristics.

Trachycarpus martianus photo has a distinctly magenta tint – perhaps the result of an early pressing of my copy of the text.

The section on cycads is less successful overall because all the species featured can be found in other books on cycads and the vast majority of the species shown are rarely seen in public gardens or even in most botanic gardens. I would have preferred to see more pages on palms.

This book admirably fills in the gaps created by the growing number of palm books on the market. I would like to see a Pocket Guide II with an even greater emphasis on additional palms not described in other books. This book is reasonably priced and is a worthy addition to the palm collector's library.

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