

Hyophorbe verschaffeltii, Spindle Palm¹

Melissa H. Friedman, Michael G. Andreu, Heather V. Quintana, and Mary McKenzie²

Family

Arecaceae, palm family.

Genus

Hyophorbe is a combination of two Greek words: *hyo* meaning "pig, hog" and *phorb*, meaning "feed, fodder." The name is thought to come from the use of the palm's fruit for pig fodder.

Species

The species name, *verschaffeltii*, is the Latinized version of the person's surname for which this palm was named: Verschaffelt, a Belgian nurseryman of the 19th century.

Common Name

spindle palm

The common name of this palm comes from the spindly shape of its stem, with the largest diameter of the trunk occurring mid-length along its stem.

Description

This palm is endemic to the Mascarene Islands, which are located to the east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The palm naturally inhabits the well-drained sandy soils of upland forests and coastal savannas. In the United States, this palm grows in south Florida, extreme southern California, and the Hawaiian Islands. This slow-growing tree can reach heights that range from 20 to 25 feet, growing best in full sunlight. The pinnately compound leaves or fronds can grow from 6 to 10 feet long and are attached to a petiole that can extend nearly one foot long. Its lance-shaped leaflets are dark green, approximately 2 1/2 feet long, and grow out of the rachis at different angles, giving the leaf a feathery look. The trunk is light gray, has rings around it, and is most swollen at the midpoint of its total height. On top of the trunk sits a bright green crownshaft (from which the fronds emerge) that has a smooth, waxy surface and can reach 2 to 3 feet in height. The base of the crownshaft tapers from the swollen part of the trunk and becomes more slender as it elongates to the top of the palm. Inflorescences can reach lengths of 2 1/2 feet, are heavily branched, and encircle the trunk just below the crownshaft. Male and female flowers occur on the same inflorescence and are white or

1. This document is FOR 241, one of a series of the School of Forest Resources and Conservation Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date May 2010. Visit the EDIS Website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Melissa H. Friedman, biological scientist, School of Forest Resources and Conservation, IFAS, University of Florida, Plant City Center; Michael G. Andreu, assistant professor of forest systems, School of Forest Resources and Conservation; Heather V. Quintana, research assistant, School of Forest Resources and Conservation; and Mary McKenzie, research assistant, School of Forest Resources and Conservation

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Millie Ferrer-Chancy, Interim Dean

cream colored. Each fruit is 3/4 inch in diameter and turns from orange to red as it ripens.

Applications

Horticultural

The trunk of this palm is somewhat unusual, since its widest diameter occurs mid-length. It can be planted as a singular palm or blended with other palms on the landscape. Spindle palm grows best in full sun and requires irrigation during dry periods. Like the bottle palm (*Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*), it is sensitive to freezing temperatures. However, the spindle palm is somewhat tolerant of and more likely to survive freezing temperatures than the bottle palm. This species is susceptible to lethal yellowing disease (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp146>), so it is best to avoid planting the spindle palm where the disease is known to occur. This palm may also be deficient in potassium and magnesium and, therefore, it may be necessary to provide additional nutrient supplements. Spindle palm makes an attractive indoor plant and will do well as long as enough light and space are available. Although it is cultivated and planted worldwide, in its natural range spindle palm is critically endangered, almost to the point of extinction.

References

Borrer, D. J. 1988. *Dictionary of root words and combining forms* (2nd ed.). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Floridata.com. 1999. *Hyophorbe verschaffeltii*, Retrieved from http://www.floridata.com/ref/h/hyop_ver.cfm

Harrison, N. A. and M. L. Elliot. 2009. *Lethal yellowing (LY) of palm* (PP146). Gainesville, FL: UF-IFAS Florida Cooperative Extension Service. Retrieved from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp146>

Meerow, A. W. 2004. *Betrock's guide to landscape palms* (9th ed.). Hollywood, FL: Betrock Information Systems.

Riffle, R. L. and P. Craft. 2003. *An encyclopedia of cultivated palms*. Portland, OR: Timber Press, Inc.