



# CFPACS Takes Over Longwood

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The members of the Central Florida Palm and Cycad Society board were challenged to find new host sites in the Spring of 2024 at a board meeting in Land O' Lakes, shortly after our regular meeting in Lutz. The 2025 Fall Meeting was the last of the three meetings designated for new stops before we return to the familiar confines of Rob Branch's garden in Sarasota. After two prolific meetings in the spring and summer and with rain on the way, it seemed like the momentum might stall. There was no such bad fortune as the meeting set a recent attendance record and we were able to slide by with only a few brief showers.

The morning started early, with some attendees arriving half an hour early to get a sneak peek of the garden without wading through the anticipated large crowd. The ample space made it easier transport a Dioon given as a token of our appreciation to Neal Ekengren, the host of our first site. After the presentation of the host gift under a gorgeous Bismarckia, the tour continued around the house to the back, where water features and stone sculptures greeted eager attendees. The garden has a wonderful design, with large pathways and accent plants complementing a wide palette of cold-tolerant palms from the Arenga, Bismarckia, Chamaedorea, Chamaerops, Chrysalidocarpus, Livistona, Phoenix, Rhaps, Sabal, and Syagrus genera. A large boulder and multiple themed sculpture gardens made the tour a unique experience that will be remembered for a lifetime.

After an extended break for lunch, folks began to filter into the second site. Even more so than the tour, anxious buyers sorted through the inventory of four vendors competing for their business. One of the vendors, our host, put out a list of tropical and subtropical palms at reduced prices from his own private nursery. The meeting officially began after everyone was parked and gathered in the center of the property for a short address from two former IPS Presidents from our local affiliate, Ray Hernandez and Rob Blenker.

Our host Alex then gave a quick overview of the garden and began guiding the attendees around each of the heavily mulched garden beds bordered by rip rap. The garden was in immaculate condition from a superior care regimen and plenty of rain leading up to the meeting. All of the crownshaft palms looked like they were being grown in native conditions, and the labels were easy to read and did not take away from the aesthetic appearance of each of the garden beds.

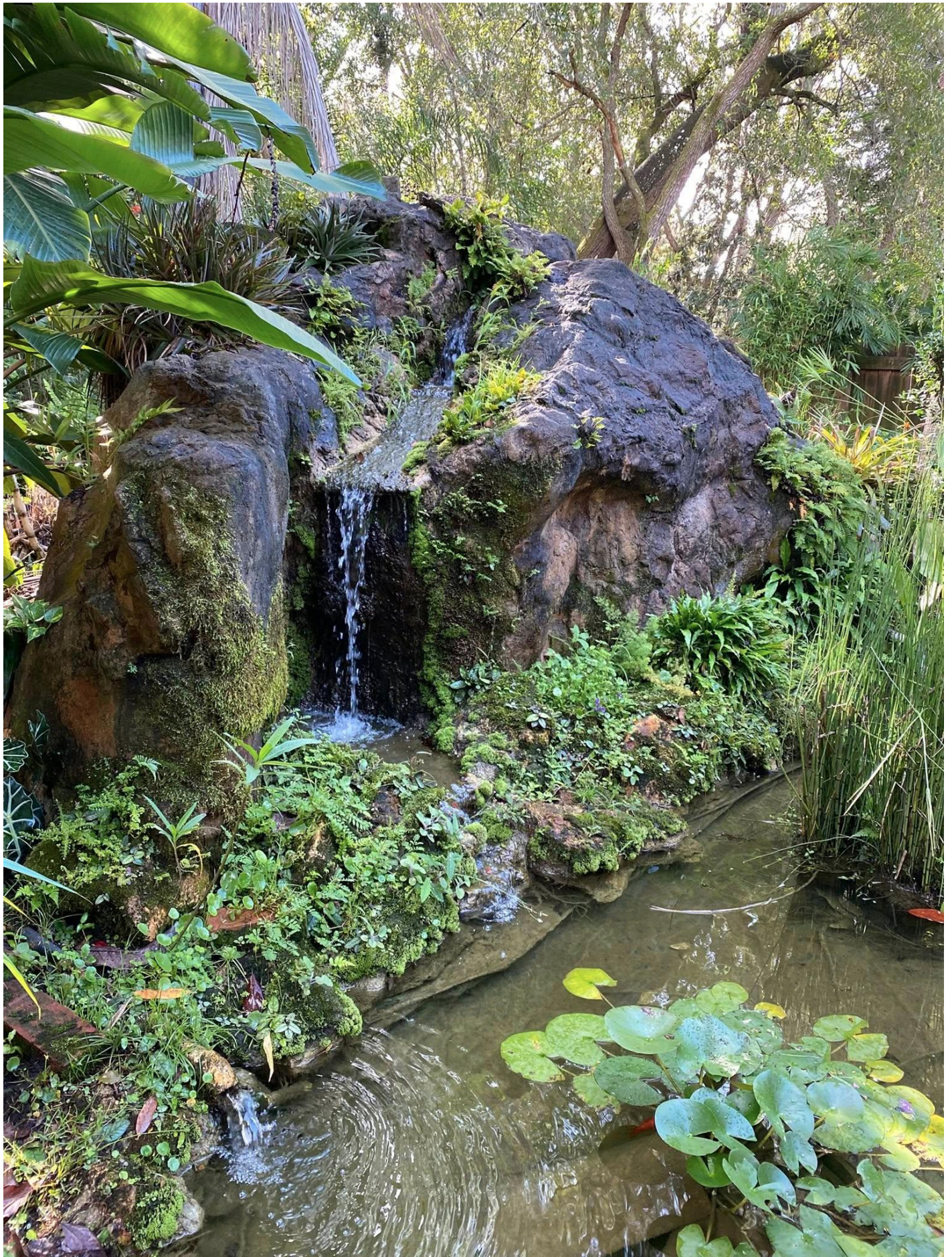
As the walking tour closed, members lined up for their auction numbers and perused the auction plants for gems they could add to their own landscapes. The auction items featured rare palms like *Medemia argun*, various cycads, and even bags of fertilizer. We experienced a brief shower, and then it was time for everyone to make one last trip to the vendor areas to pick up any last-minute purchases and adjourn. The board stayed to discuss next year's schedule and then folded up the fort just in time for a torrential downpour. A fitting end to a record setting meeting at two new sites – the gardens were watered free of charge.





*The presentation of the host plant to Neal Ekengren.*





*The boulder garden created and sculpted by Neal Ekengren.*





*Both seasoned veterans and new members meet the CFPACS Board of Directors.*



*Group photo at the first site.*



*Everyone gets lost in the woods.*





*The host addresses attendees before the tour.*



*Alex starts the second tour of the meeting.*





*Y'all sure we're still in Central Florida?*



*Roystonea regia and Beccariophoenix alfredii – the new royalty of Central Florida.*



*Auction time!!!*





*Attendees packed both the front yard and the back yard to buy palms from vendors.*





*Former IPS Presidents Rob Blenker and Ray Hernandez address the CFPACS faithful.*

## **Additional Links**

Fall Meeting 2025:

<https://www.palmtalk.org/forum/topic/89888-central-florida-palm-cycad-society-fall-2025-meeting/>

The IPS Webinar series is available on our Publications page:

<https://cfpacs.com/org/palmateer/>

Holiday Meeting 2025:

<https://www.palmtalk.org/forum/topic/91407-central-florida-palm-cycad-society-holiday-2025-meeting/>