

The Palmateer

Volume 14 Number 4

Central Florida Palm & Cycad Society

December 2022

December Meeting

By Libby Luedeke

We took it to the road this December and visited Chip Jones's new nursery in Moore Haven. A bit of a jaunt, but highly worth it. We were joined by the Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society, a bromeliad society, and a croton society for a turnout of 90 participants. It was a gorgeous breezy, sunny day filled with high spirits and camaraderie. Although Chip claims he is a full two years away from realizing the dream he is envisioning, we found everything



to be beautiful and well organized as is. What this man can pull off in one day would take most of us a week. He is a one man show with awesome big boy toys that help a lot.

Chip has had his trials with a colder environment than he experienced in Davie. Although being quite far

south he gets conditions more like 9B than 10. Last winter it went into the 30's and although the temps themselves weren't the biggest issue, two nights of frost were. Some cycads completely defoliated but came back with nice flushes thereafter such as the *hildebrandii*. Then

the recent hurricanes left their mark, thrashing the new leaves and leaving areas flooded for days that were unexpected. Considering all of that, they looked very good. Some major casualties were *Aechmea* bromeliads. They didn't handle the frost at all.

One of my favorite sections is the mutation garden where Chip is experimentally designing cycads that show off three characteristics, he is interested in: Semi-dwarf, overlapping and rounded

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Potentially Invasive Palms in Florida

By Dr. John Rossi, President St. Johns Botanical Garden

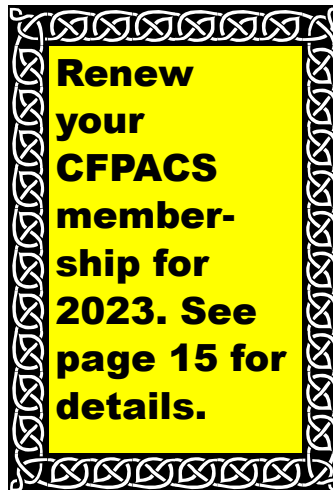
Because of its warm climate, Florida has historically been an inviting place for many species of animals and plants, and for that matter, people. They may arrive here naturally, as in the case of cattle egrets, blown over from Africa during a storm in the forties, or with a little help from people, like the ubiquitous brown anole lizard or Burmese pythons. The

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The Palmateer

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The Palmateer
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December Meeting

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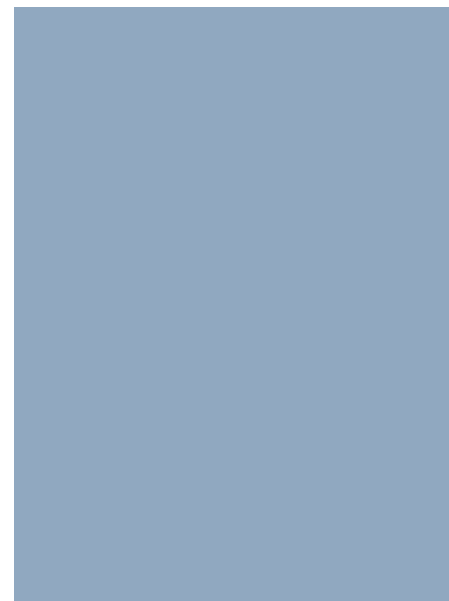
leaflets. Also, variegated Coonties that flush bright yellow and then turn green as they harden off. These are being created to add more interest for the landscape trade.

Along the way Chip told us a story I thought it'd be fun to share. He was with a group that went to Mexico to see cycads in habitat. They hiked, way outside of any cities, crossing suspension bridges and climbing limestone cliffs to this very remote village. They were eyed suspiciously, but the people were very kind and they made their up these embankments to view the cycads there. Along the way Chip spotted this bromeliad that had the most spectacular flower on it. It

appeared as though someone had just smashed it into the rock with their heels and left it, a *Pitcairnia tabuliformis*. Chip is asking members in his group to come take a picture when along came a group of men from the village armed with machetes telling them no pictures, they must leave. After much discussion and easing of tempers they convinced the locals they were not there to poach or destroy the plants. The men understood but were still adamant that they take no more pictures and go. Once they left, Chip asked the crew if anyone managed to get a picture and all said no. Chip was devastated. Amazingly about three

months later he went to a bromeliad sale where he met up with Eloise Beach, who is a retired commercial grower from the Orlando area, who happened to have this exact bromeliad. Chip was elated and at this point would have paid anything to get this plant. He wound up purchasing it for around \$15 and will have this fine specimen to remind him of that adventure. Since then he created a rock garden to mimic the conditions the cycads were thriving in and included his *Pitcairnia*. It's quite spectacular! Along with Paul Marcellini, Chip brought the huge rocks in and they got to work chipping out holes for the specimens to rest in.

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At the cycad nursery—Libby, above; Jeremy, below



Potentially Invasive Palms

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egrets found the open prairies of Florida to be much like the open areas of Africa, and adapted quickly to a niche that was empty. Hundreds of other species of animals, and thousands of species of plants were brought here, and flourished. And that includes many species of palms.

Even though at the current time, no species of palm has been classified as a Category I invasive species by the state of Florida, which is defined as a plant likely to spread in a native environment and outcompete native species to the point of changing that ecosystem, there are several species that appear to be quite capable of doing so. The first

palm likely to achieve that status is the Senegal Date Palm *Phoenix reclinata*. They have a high tolerance for cold, drought, salt, and flooding. They are spreading rapidly in some swampy areas of Florida. Another palm of major concern is the queen palm, *Syagrus romanzoffiana*, which is definitely reproducing all around the state due to its cold tolerance, rapid growth and prolific seed production. The fruits are consumed by a wide variety of animals including dogs, raccoons, foxes, opossums, and even turtles! Those animals then transport the seeds and deposit them some distance away from the parent tree along with fertilizer! The same may be said of the Mexican Fan Palm, *Washingtonia robusta*. The Chinese Fan

Palm *Livistona chinensis* is also a likely candidate. Because its fruits are highly prized by squirrels, young plants appear at quite some distance from the parent plant. The Bismarck Palm *Bismarckia nobilis* is another such palm, capable of reproducing readily once it achieves a certain size. The large seeds sprout rapidly around the parent tree.

In the warmer areas of Florida, a variety of palms may be invasive, in addition to those mentioned above. The Solitaire Palm or Alexander Palm *Ptychosperma elegans* is often found popping up in hedges in southern Florida. King Palms (all six species and hybrids) *Archontophoenix sp* can also be prolific seed producers, even though the young plants are usually concen-

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Bismarckia, drought & cold tolerant, invasive [above]; young Bismarcks sprouting —John Rossi

By Jeremy Evanchesky

December Meeting

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He humorously calls it Rock City. The cycads planted in the garden appear small compared to the size of the rocks, but if it was in a pot in your home, it would be quite large. Chip has noted that cycads he grows in pots take three times longer to get to the size these have gotten from living in conditions closer to their habitat.

Another interesting spot

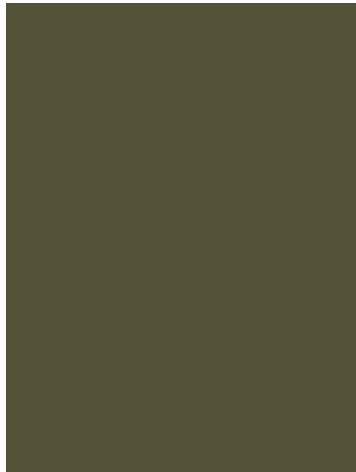


At the cycad nursery—Jeremy; Libby, above

in the garden, which Chip refers to as his macro bonsai, is an old oak that you would think would have to be dead but is still making new growth. This is referred to as Jin, deadwood on a tree. You'll see Chip pictured with his arm right through the center.

We had a great auction and our newfound friends bought lots of our t shirts so we can expect lots of advertising! Hopefully Chip will

invite us back in a couple of years when he has it all dialed in. I'm sure there will be several changes.



Potentially Invasive Palms

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trated near the parent plant. Palms of the genus *Veitchia* are similar to king palms in this respect. Areca Palms *Dypsis lutescens* and Burmese Fishtail Palms *Caryota mitis* are also on the watch list.

Perhaps the most famous (and well loved) of all of the invasive palms, is the Coconut Palm *Cocos nucifera*. Not originally native to Florida, or probably much of its current pan tropical range, the coconut palm has become a ubiquitous, and accepted species in all areas where it survives. By the definition above, it spreads rapidly and changes the environ-

ment which it occupies. Therefore, it is definitely an invasive species. Originally from the Indian Ocean, it was extremely well adapted to tropical ocean coastlines. Once it crossed Africa and entered the Atlantic Ocean, all bets were off trying to control it. In addition to being highly sought after by humans for its edible fruit and natural beauty, it was quite capable of spreading naturally since a coconut can float for months in the open ocean and settle on a far away beach. Historically, coconut palms in Florida got their start in Florida in 1878, when a ship loaded with 20,000 coconuts on the way from Cuba to Spain crashed on the Florida coast. The

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Potentially Invasive Palms

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locals at the time were only too happy to get them, eating some and planting many!! The rest is history, with the range of coconut palms in Florida now extending from just a little north of Melbourne on the east coast, with isolated pockets or specimens as far north as St. Augustine and extending around the peninsula to as far north as Tampa on the west coast. The prolific palm is also found inland across much of south Florida. It is sprouting from trash heaps left on dead end roads, and in vacant lots, and road-

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Updated Data for the Holidays

By Jeremy Evanchesky

Perhaps the most frustrating part of cultivating palms is the plethora of seemingly conflicting information regarding the cold tolerance of palm species. At one point, *Bismarckia nobilis* was only considered to be a safe palm in zone 10a or above. These palms were gorgeous and many planted them “out-of-zone” in areas that were considered too chilly for them to last in central and north Florida. There are now specimens growing in coastal Georgia.

After seeing this phenomenon repeat itself with multiple species over the years, a project was begun to collate all of the cold tolerance information into one document that could be filtered or queried easily. The project started with observations recorded by Larry Noblick and a document published by CFPACS for the freezes from 1957 through 1989, with observations primarily from the Orlando, Daytona, and Melbourne areas. This was the original release of the Cold Hardiness Observation Master Data on PalmTalk on September 19th, 2019. This release contained 853 observations containing the low temperature and descriptions of the damage.

Fast forward 3 years and the amount of information in the sheet has increased exponentially. There are now more than 4,900 observations for 711 species of palms, a separate sheet of observations for cycads, 64 additional valid species of palms defined, event descriptions for each of the 83 significant cold events defined, and a table of synonyms for species that have been updated or combined.

A very special thanks to Saint Johns Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve for adding over 200 observations from last year’s cold wave, many for species that had no previous observations.

To download the most recent edition, you can use this link: <https://tinyurl.com/knz7evhb>



A planting bed added to the Membership Chair’s garden after the Fall Meeting. The border is concrete cut from a curb.

Coonties: Florida's Ancient Native Ancestor

By Libby Luedeke

The *Zamia integrifolia*, a.k.a. Coontie, like all cycads has ancient origins, but this one is the only one native to North America. The Coontie has historically been an important starch source to Native Americans and early settlers. It is also the favorite food source of the rare *Atala* butterfly. This is one of the most hardy, slow growing cycads that works best as a low maintenance shrub and is often confused with palms and ferns. It is very drought tolerant, salt tolerant and cold tolerant. But while ferns have spores and palms have flowers, cycads are a gymnosperm that produces cones. This shrub with palm-like fronds has a compact size of about 2 ½ to 3 feet tall and about 3 feet wide. Landscapers and cycad enthusiasts have introduced these plants into parks and gardens throughout Florida.

The planting location for the Coontie would be a spot where there is enough room for the roots to spread and the leaves to grow freely in sandy, well-draining soil. It can be full sun or shade. Keep an adequate distance from foundations, walls, or decks to avoid issues with growth. When placing in the ground, make sure to keep the root ball higher than the surrounding grade and fill with soil to the base. Water well, but don't make sure any mulch stops at the root ball to prevent decay. The first year it needs watering about every two weeks but will be a very drought resistant plant thereafter. Established plants really don't require fertilizer. Pruning may rarely be needed, and pests should be treated with natural oils such as neem to safely control scale.



Zamia integrifolia—



Zamia furfuracea hybrid
that Chip is trying out—
Libby

Potentially Invasive Palms

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sides. And yet, it is cultivated by the thousands in south Florida nurseries. In short, we would say that this species has become “naturalized” which means that it has become established and is living in the wild in an area where it is not native. To the purist environmentalist this is the worst outcome possible and this is a nightmare species. But to the average Floridian and tourist, coconut palms are the stuff that dreams are made of! When you think about vacationing somewhere, aren’t places with white sandy beaches and swaying coconut palms near the top of your list?

In spite of this, the naturalization of palms and any

other species is game over for a native ecosystem. The existence of such plants changes that environment forever, and may change it enough to drive some of the naturally occurring plants to extinction. This may occur by either direct competition, or by changing the environment in such a way that the native species can’t survive. It is for this reason that we must be careful about using certain species, and if we must, then choose a location where their spread can be limited. However, it is important to note that some species are occupying a vacant niche, like the cattle egret mentioned above. In other words, they have not displaced any

species; they are just occupying a part of the environment that no other species was utilizing. The coconut palm may be such a species, since there were few tall trees occupying our southern beaches, except for the sabal palm, and even though sabals are salt tolerant, they are not as tolerant of salt as the coconut.

Other non-native species may be occupying an environment so disturbed by overdevelopment that it may not make much difference to plant them there i.e., Planting a Mexican Fan Palm *Washingtonia robusta* in a downtown parking lot, where it is surrounded by concrete, roads and buildings may not represent a significant risk for

spreading or changing a native environment that has already been destroyed! And, if that species happens to require less water to survive, it may not be as damaging to the environment as it seems. Indeed, many mature palms are drought tolerant, and require little to no irrigation in order to survive. This helps to conserve water, a precious commodity.

However, there can be no doubt that it is better to use native palms rather than introduced ones when designing a landscape, under normal circumstances. All of them are drought tolerant once established. There are 12 species native to Florida depending upon who is doing the

lumping or splitting this week, and they may be utilized successfully for a variety of different landscape needs. Depending upon what part of Florida they are native to, they are pre-adapted to our soils and climate. The Sabal palm, *Sabal palmetto* is our state tree and pretty much ubiquitous throughout much of the state. Its natural range pretty much follows zone 9 and south, however they are widely planted in zone 8. The Dwarf Blue Stem Palm *Sabal minor* is also widespread in the state and commonly used in the landscape. Of course, the super cold hardy and drought tolerant Saw Palmetto *Serenoa repens*, particularly the silver/blue variety is a very popular

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Potentially Invasive Palms

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hedge. The majestic Royal Palm *Roystonea regia* is also native to southern Florida and does very well throughout southern Florida. They are a little more cold tolerant than some think, with adult specimens regularly surviving temps in the mid 20s. The same may be said for the Silver Thatch Palm *Leucothrinax morrissii*, which can look at times like a dwarf Bismarck, and the Florida silver palm *Coccothrinax argentata*, which is a slow growing but beautiful little palm. The Needle palm *Rhapidophyllum hystrix* is one of the most cold hardy palms in the world, and it is a middle sized clumping

shrub with palmate (fan-shaped) leaves that provides a tropical look in places that can get pretty darn cold. The Florida (Green) Thatch Palm *Thrinax radiata* is a very reliable and beautiful small to middle sized palm that handles cold fairly well if it has a little frost protection. The Buccaneer Palm *Pseudophoenix sargentii* is an extremely attractive bluish pinnate leafed (feather leafed) single trunk palm with quite a bit of cold tolerance. Those at the St. Johns Botanical Garden in Hastings, Florida have been exposed to temperatures as low as 25 degrees F under some oak canopy cover and shown no damage. The Everglades Palm *Acoelorrhaphe*

wrightii is a large multi-trunking palmate leafed palm that is used in a wide variety of applications. It tolerates full sun and shade, drought or flooding, and it is fairly cold tolerant. The two native species that have been largely ignored by collectors and landscapers alike are the diminutive Florida Scrub Palm *Sabal etonia* and the nearly extinct relative Miami Palmetto *Sabal miamiensis*. Even though extremely cold hardy, their small size and slow growth doesn't make them very sought after palms.

All of these palms can be used in the landscape to achieve the desired effect. But there is one legitimate reason why

these palms might not be selected, and that is the possibility of disease. Lethal Bronzing Disease is spreading throughout the state. Of the native palms, our state tree *Sabal palmetto* and the Buccaneer palm have been shown to be susceptible to this disease. The others have not yet been shown to be. Sometimes, developers may choose palms that are somewhat resistant to lethal bronzing instead, but this list is shrinking fast! Therefore, developers should be encouraged to use these palms over many of the imported species. Unfortunately, the desire to plant new and unique looking plants is as old as hu-

manity. You might have better luck asking people to stop keeping dogs and cats!



Three of the most potentially invasive palms in one picture. From left to right, a Queen; a Chinese Fan, and a Senegal Date palm. Tough, drought and flood tolerant, shade tolerant palms capable of surviving and reproducing without any help in many Florida soils and conditions. —John Rossi

Growing *Acrocomia* from Seed

By Steve Farnsworth

I first became interested in growing *Acrocomia aculeata* from seed when I picked up a bucket of seeds from Rob Branch. I was pretty sure that I could sell some of these palms if I grew them; however, there is little information on how to germinate them. Most sources said they could take several years to germinate and no one seemed to know what made them sprout. The recommendations were to throw them into a mulch or compost pile and dig out the plants when they finally sprouted. Most plants in the trade seem to come from people who have fruiting palms and dig up the seedlings when they appear, usually in some odd and hard-to-reach place.

I don't have any mature *Acrocomias* in the ground and the mulch pile idea wasn't going to work for me, since I have squirrels and other rodents that would dig up the large seeds and chew through the hard coats to get at the endosperm inside. I decided to make a pseudo mulch pile by taking a storage bin, drilling drainage holes in

the bottom, filling it with wood chipping mulch, and putting the seeds down as a top layer. The mulch bin went under a bench in a growing house covered in wire mesh to keep the critters out. The growing house does not have any other coverings and experiences outside temperatures and rainfall.

There was no seed germination the first year, as expected. A few seedlings popped up the second year. In the third year, there was a significant flush of seedlings in early summer, and then none the rest of the year. The next year, in late June and early July, there was again a significant flush of seedlings and then none the rest of the year. I could see that there was a pattern forming, and waited again to see if it would happen again this year, which it did. Apparently, something was triggering the seeds to germinate at a specific time of the year, possibly the return of warm summertime soil temperatures, or increased water as the rainy season started. I don't know the exact cause of the triggering mechanism, but it is real and it is consistent.

I do not know how many years these seeds take to germinate, since I have added new



Late August 2022 – Annual early summer flush of seedlings in germination bin.

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South Florida Palm Society Sale

By Dr. John Rossi

On Saturday and Sunday, November 19th and 20th, the **South Florida Palm Society** hosted a palm and cycad sale at the Pinecrest Botanical Garden. As I am still procuring specimens for the St. Johns Botanical Garden, I felt that that I needed to check it out. I couldn't make it on Saturday since I had to work, but I drove down for the event after work and was ready to go early Sunday morning. When I arrived, I was struck by the sheer size of the botanical garden there, and its massive limestone infrastructure. Began in 1936, it was the original location of Miami's Parrot Jungle. And even though I didn't have time to study the collection there, I could see that it was pretty impressive. One could easily get lost in that 20-acre tropical maze. But as I came to the clearing where the palm sale was being held, I noticed the destruction of the previous night's storms. A number of tents were collapsed or weighted down with pockets of water. I tried to help some members of the South Florida Palm Society stand up their tents but the frames were broken and we didn't have much luck. And the rain wouldn't stop! It would lighten up once in a while but it was pretty much constant. In spite of that, the variety of palms and cycads there was impressive. I eagerly wandered from table to table even before most of the vendors arrived and observed the collections there. Sometimes I would take shelter under the tents before

moving quickly to the next tent. So many palms, so little dry space!

The list of palms available included everything from *Archontophoenix* to *Zombia*, including some species and varieties that I had never seen for sale before. These included *Bentinckia nicobarica*, *Calyptrocalyx yamutumune*, *Chamaedorea tenella*, *Dypsis rufescens* (*Chrysalidocarpus rufescens*), *Marojejya darianii*, and *Ptychosperma* "Lisa" (fused leaf). In addition to those rarities, there were spectacular specimens of species that we already have at the garden but could always use a few more, such as *Archontophoenix purpurea*, *Beccariophoenix alfredii*, *Chamaedorea woodsoniana*, *Chuniophoenix hainanensis*, *Gaussia attenuata*, *Kerriodoxa elegans*, *Lanonia dasyantha*, *Pseudophoenix sargentii*, *Raphis excelsa* "super dwarf", *Raphis multifida*, and *Thrinax radiata*. Some were destined for our nursery, others to be added to the collection on display. So many other kinds of palms and cycads were there as well and I wanted to keep shopping but by noon, I was soaked to the socks, and decided to pack up and leave. I also had a 5-hour drive to get back to Hastings, and the rain seemed to be getting heavier over the show, not lighter. In fact, it rained all the way back, suggesting that it was raining over the entire state! However, in spite of the rain, the sale was a great place to find a wide variety of palms and meet some great folks, and I would recommend it to everyone when they hold it again next year. Just check the weather report first!

Growing *Acrocomia* from Seed

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seeds to the mulch bin several times, and my seeds are of mixed ages. I do know that they take at least two years and may remain viable for possibly five or six years. It might be possible to speed up germination by cutting or grinding a notch into the hard thick seed coat, but I haven't tried that and probably won't, since my current methods are working,

Acrocomias are ball-and-socket palms with remote germination. They put down a larger sinker, form a small ball several inches down, and come back up with a spear leaf. The ball grows larger with time and pushes itself deeper in the ground. Although these palms will put up one or two good-sized leaves quickly, their root system remains underdeveloped and they resent being disturbed if repotted shortly after germination. They do much better if left to grow for nearly a year, and then being repotted. Despite having spiny leaves, rabbits apparently find them tasty, especially as one to two leaf seedlings. I don't know how they get around the spines, but they

do. Once the seedlings get four or five leaves and have bigger spines, the rabbits seem to leave them alone.

Once they get established, *Acrocomias* are relatively fast-growing palms. *A. aculeata* is a variable species with two forms in Florida – the typical green *aculeata* form, and a gray-green form with larger spines that has been sometimes called *A. totai*. They are an acquired taste – many people don't like their spine-covered nature which limits where they can be planted, while others are fascinated by it. Cold hardiness seems to increase with the age and height of the palm, and they recover well even if they get hit by hard freezes. It can be a fun palm if you have the right temperament and location for it.

Montgomery Botanical News Fall/Winter issue reports a successful mission to obtain parts of the Makalani Palm, *Hyphaene petersiana* in Namibia.



Acrocomia at Heathcote Botanical Gardens
—John Kennedy



Coconut Palms, invasive and beloved—John Rossi

From the Editor's Desk

At the beginning of December, I had my first cataract removed and the second was removed the week of the 14th. As a result, I have been unable to read clearly for much of the month.

I was able to pre-prepare for the publication all material sent before the 1st. My son Matthew volunteered to produce the December issue and I am very grateful for his help.

I will attend the march meeting in Brevard County and look forward to seeing you all [clearly] again.

John Kennedy

From the guest editor's desk:

You may notice some differences in this issue since I am not as familiar with the look and feel of the *Palmateer*. Please forgive me if I have misidentified any palms. That said, I have tried to keep it as closely in my Dad's style as possible.

Matthew Kennedy

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Season Greetings Everyone. Let's just hope our weather stays perfect like it is now. First, I would like to thank Chip Jones for hosting our December meeting at his wonderful nursery, we must have had over a hundred people in attendance quite a successful event. It is amazing to see how much work Chip has done at his new location since his move from the Ft. Lauderdale area over two years ago.

Next I would like to mention our next meeting hopefully will be in Brevard County. Stay tuned, we are still working out final details. Also we are still trying to plan a work day or two this winter or spring at Sugar Mill Gardens. Details will also be forthcoming.

Happy Holidays and hope to see everyone in 2023 .

Dave Hall



Pick your own

Season's Greetings



Peace

PayPal Tutorial

Here is how to make a payment to CFPACS using PayPal

- 1) Log on to <http://www.paypal.com>
- 2) If you have a PayPal account, log into your account. If you do not have a PayPal account, click on the 'Personal' tab. Once on the 'Personal' page go to 'Send Money' and then 'Send Money Online.'
- 3) Once on the 'Send Money' page, type 'payments@cfpacs.com' in the 'To' field. Type in your email address in the 'From' field and the amount you wish to pay in the 'Amount' field.
- 4) From there you will be taken to a secure page where you can enter your name, address and credit card information.
- 5) When you are ready to finish up the payment process, please indicate whether your payment is for membership or seeds or t-shirts in the message field.

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Regular membership,
\$60, other levels of membership (including free),
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<http://palms.org>

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The Central Florida Palm & Cycad Society service area includes the following counties:
Alachua, Brevard, Citrus, DeSoto, Flagler, Hardee, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Indian River, Lake, Levy, Manatee, Marion, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Putnam, Sarasota, Seminole, St. Lucie, Sumter, Suwannee, and Volusia.



At the cycad nursery—Jeremy