

ASGAP PALM & CYCAD STUDY GROUP

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Organisation : I had hoped to get web sites set up for both study groups by now, so that I can direct people to the relevant parts of the sites for 2 main purposes :- (1) to display colour images without the cost of colour photocopying, & (2) to set up fairly static information on what species exist, & their horticultural pros & cons.

I should have had this done in July 2006, but July or August this year is now likely. I will be grateful to receive images (pictures) for future use on the website. Easiest for me are email attachments, of images from a digital camera. If these were for use in a book, the images need to be detailed (lots of pixels), say as taken by a 6 megapixel camera, & each taking up over a megabyte of computer memory. For use on a web site, where users of the site will want to be able to rapidly call up pages, the images are best kept as small as is compatible with them looking OK. Rarely do they need to be over 80 KB, & usually half that is fine. Windows can size down images for emails, & I can edit down (if necessary) any size I get. Analog (film) pictures can easily be converted to digital, but at a cost. SGAP-Qld. recently acquired the necessary equipment to do it cheaply & easily, & I just have to take my place in the queue to use it. Images of the less common species will of course be the most useful, plus natural & contrived hybrids.

For each study group I have edited items so that, for instance, all the weather bits are in the one newsletter, for easier reading.

Membership Matters : Welcome to new members Bob O'Neill, Katandra Gardens, Wandin, Victoria (Bob was the ABC's 'Gardener of the Year' a year or two ago), Robert French, 2/116-118 Burton Street, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, Philip Docherty, P.O. Box 5683, Cable Beach, WA 6726, & Dr. Darryl Hawker, 12 Moree Street, Kedron, Qld. 4031.

Subs are still \$5 in Australia & \$10 for overseas, & run from July in one year to June in the next. The 1-line table below shows your status as per my records, where a tick means paid up.

'04-'05 '05-'06 '06-'07 '07-'08 '08-'09

Nomenclature Conventions : To be pedantic, all scientific names should be in italics, & all cultivar names in quotes, but I have mostly only done this to avoid confusion, or for the first appearance of a cultivar or species in this newsletter. I do follow the convention that all species names are lower case, & cultivar names start with a capital letter.

Weather & Plant Behaviour : Here we are in our fifth year of drought, & my local creek (from which I pump to dams in normal years) has not run for 3 years. Heavy rain on the Gold & Sunshine Coasts in recent years has not penetrated much over 15 km inland, & we have had none of the heavy rain in northern coastal NSW. It stops on the southern slopes of the Border Ranges. Pasture grasses have been white for months, & many of the local gumtrees have partly defoliated. The first frost of 2006, a -3 degrees C., was 2 weeks earlier than usual, on May 24th, & then there were none until July, & they were milder. Early spring was a bit cooler than usual, then normal, then mid-November was unusually cold (as it was in the Blue Mountains, Victoria & Tasmania), with lows to 5 degrees & highs to low 20's. Several days after Christmas were also cool, with December 27th being the coldest Brisbane Dec. maximum for 100 years at 19 degrees. The rest of summer was normal, hot & sometimes humid, but rainless. Autumn 2007 has been warmer than usual, with minima above 15 degrees even in May, & maxima above 30 for most days in March, April & the first half of May.

My big *Cycas canalis* nearly flushed in early October 2006, then halted, to re-start on the 31st, with 19 1-metre leaves, which are rapidly whitening in what is now late May. My big *Cycas* 'kennedyana', a member of a 'hybrid swarm' containing genes from *Cycas media* ssp. *media* & *C. megacarpa*, according to Ken Hill, tried to seed in late spring, but I had no *Cycas* pollen to fertilise it with. In early summer it killed off half of its fronds (originally produced in early December 2004), & in late April killed off the other 12, originally produced in early January 2005, & has been leafless since.

None of my palms have been observed doing anything noteworthy, except dying due to the drought. *Archontophoenix maxima* palms have survived better than *A. myolaensis*, *A. tuckeri*, *A. alexandrae* or *A. purpurea*, although well-established plants of *A. purpurea* have thrived. *Laccospadix australasica* palms have suffered, both the single-trunked (Mt. Lewis) & multi-trunked forms, as have all *Linospadix* species. *Wodyetia* & *Normanbya* have had no losses, which surprised me for the latter. Foxtails come from such a god-forsaken area that one expects them to do well under adversity, although I have lost some with severe frosts some years ago.

Ken Hill : Friends of prominent cycad botanist Ken Hill, author of countless taxonomic articles on Australian & Asia-Pacific *Cycas* in particular, will be sad to hear that his multi systems atrophy disease has now made his speech almost impossible to understand. Not having seen him for a long time, I shall remember him as a big bouncing party animal instead. Rumours that cycad toxins had anything to do with the onset of the disease are unfounded, as my medico son had already told me. Blame genes &/or stress. He also did a lot of work on the taxonomy of Australian eucalypts.

Giant Palm Oil Company : In late November 2006 three Malaysian state-owned plantation companies announced a merger, to form the worlds largest listed palm oil producer, with 2.1 million tonnes of crude palm oil from 600,000 hectares of plantation land. Malaysia, the worlds biggest producer, hopes to take advantage of a growing demand for palm oil as a biofuels feedstock. Prices rose 23 % during 2006. Otherwise, demand might well drop for palm oil as a food component due to its high component of saturated & trans fatty acids, as consumers worldwide become more health-conscious.