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Once again the newsletter, and hopefully by now we have all members getting cameras out, because if you have a good print of a palm we can photocopy it if you liked the first one in last newsletter. If there is a particularly nice palm in your area, send us a print, but please it must be a native palm.

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Rain Forest palms and "CHAKORO" the Fan Palm  
by Len Butt

From the wonderful array of flowering plants we have on our planet, a very special place goes to the family PRINCIPLES (palmae) with 212 genera and close to 3,000 known species. Most are tall solitary trees, but many form thick clumps, some quite trunkless and others again are minute undergrowth plants. We have about 40 species within this country, as well as several undescribed forms. Botanically the six family types that occur here also have close relatives in Malayasia, Burma and Indonesia.

Palm leaves the world over fall into three basic leaf shapes Palmate (fan-leafed), Pinnate (feather palms) and bipinnate (caryota or fish-tail).

Of the palms native to Australia six basic divisions can be spoken of:-

- Arecoideae - pinnate and monoecious
- Borassoideae - palmate and dioecious
- Coryphoideae - palmate and monoecious
- Caryotoideae - pinnate or bipinnate - induplicate
- Lepidocaryoideae - pinnate climbers with scale covered berries (fruit)
- Hypoideae - pinnate trunkless in Mangroves

Palms are graceful plants that are now gaining their true place in the world's flora. Indeed, the exotic phoenix (date palm) is often referred to as the original tree of life.

The majority of our palms are suited to garden cultivation and if properly placed can lend the grace of the rainforest and the majesty of the tropical flora. Remembering always that these lovely members of the principles, need shade and wind shelter when young, semi-shade and ample light when older.

For healthy luxuriant growth, warmth and moisture levels needed depend on particular habitat. However, if they are not exposed to extremes of frost or prolonged dryness they will grow well, and blend in with most other forest or rainforest species in an average garden. An ideal garden for palms would have a selection of large trees, pathways rather than lawns, a minimum of concrete paths and an understorey of tropical vegetation in which I would include tropical gingers, cordyline, dracena, maranta, colathea, and many ground covers.

Climbing palms have a real place in such a situation and although we cannot import the many rattans of Malaysia, Indonesia and New-Guinnea, our Lawyer vines or Calamus palms are spectacular enough to be cultivated as part of the scene. Australia has only three genera of the coryohoid palms, *Corypha*, *Livistona* and *Licuala*, the latter species is the largest and has only one species in Australia.

"Chakoro" is an aboriginal name used in Tully areas for *Licuala ramsayii* (syn. *muelleri*) which in my opinion is our most beautiful and majestic palm, growing as it does in pockets of true rainforest of Northern Queensland from just north of Townsville to extreme areas of Cape York. Main populations occur near Mission Beach, Tully, Daintree River and Cape Tribulation with smaller sections in parts of the Bloomfield River.

This palm can grow to immense heights and in Mission Beach areas it appears as the main forestation, rivalled only by the great tangled understorey of the climbing *Calamus moti* palms, (spiny lawyer-cane).

The great circular fan leaves are really outstanding consisting of a windmill effect of wedge shaped segments joined together. The leaflet tips are jagged edged right around the entire leaf shape. In the areas of south-east Queensland growing as a garden palm, there is only one real disadvantage. If you cannot provide

shade for the Licuala, it is not for you. It must be shade grown all through its life and the deeper the shade the healthier the palm.

Strangely, though, I have seen Licuala ramsayii growing well as exposed plants where the rest of the deep rainforest has been cleared generally as a four metre palm with palmate leaves remaining from ground level on the plant.

I must stress however, that this was only in its particular habitat.

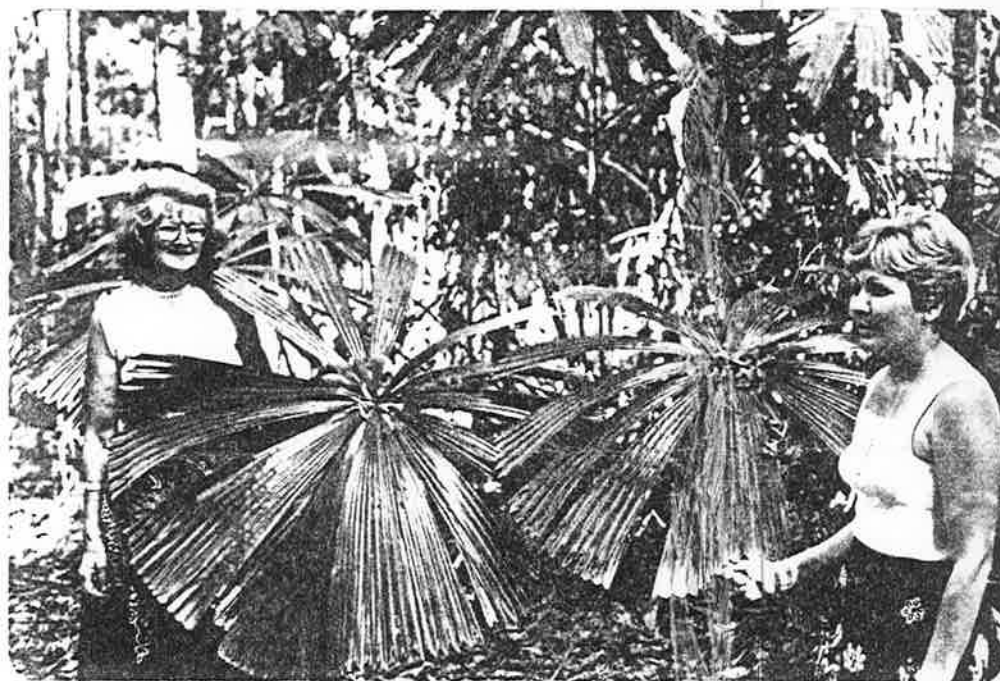
Seed is particularly hard to find, because of the vegetation around the mature palms. To really collect seed in quantity you may just have to get there ahead of the roving cassowary, endure the green ants, leeches and very spiny forms of lawyer cane palms. A seedling palm on private property is where I managed to find some. A palm in full fruit is very spectacular. The masses of seed berries stand out among the lovely shiny green circles of the palm's leaves.

Most seed of this Licuala is not difficult to raise and cultivate if its requirements are kept in mind. Hot bed germination is recommended in cooler areas, but in northern Queensland a seed mix of 50 percent peat moss, 50 percent coarse sand is ideal. Actually the fresher the seed the higher the germination. To cultivate, it should be simply anywhere in coastal south Queensland and wet tropical Qld. Make sure it gets the shade needed and the water to push it ahead and you should have success. Such essentials as rich soil composed of organic matter such as rotted manure and composted debris are ideal for all palms, and especially the rainforest types.

As a container plant, this particular Licuala has wonderful potential. It will thrive for many years and make a really handsome tub specimen if grown in a sarlon covered bush-house or on a semi-shaded patio or courtyard. A yearly check on drainage holes is advantageous, and regular waterings during spring and summer with nitrogen fertiliser will really improve its growth. Such applications should be with products having a higher nitrogen ratio than their potassium and phosphate, but not straight nitrogen.

Organic pelletised manure, which is becoming available is also good around container grown palms.

In most of its habitats where this palm has formed into *large* colonies, the area can be fairly swampy, in fact in the wet season many of the seedlings are submerged without apparent ill effect. This gives some indication to the amount of waterlogging some rainforest species can tolerate.



LICUALA RAMSAYII