

SCRUB PALMETTO, or *Sabal etonia*

by Gertrude W. Cole

Eleven species of palms are native to Florida, and *Sabal etonia* is found naturally nowhere else in the world. Its habitat is the sand scrub and dry pinelands of central Florida, from Lake County to, and including, Broward County.

Its s-shaped stem (trunk) is below the surface and only rarely erect to but a few feet.

The leaves of *S. etonia* are very definitely costopalmate. That is to say that the petiole, or leaf stem, extends into the fan-shaped leaf as a curved midrib. The leaf segments form a trough with numerous threads between the stiff segments. (The leaves of *Sabal minor*, the only palm with which *S. etonia* might be confused, show no midrib and no threads.) Like all other Sabals, *S. etonia* has no teeth on the petioles — definitely distinguishing it from young *Serenoa repens*, the saw palmetto.

The inflorescence, much branched and short, usually lies along the ground. It does not extend above the



leaves as in *S. minor*.

The fruit — round, black, and about a half inch in diameter — ripens beginning in September and hangs on into January. The seeds are brown and flat on both top and bottom.

S. etonia is adapted to full sun and capable of withstanding considerable cold and drought. Because it grows naturally in sandy soil, it must have good drainage if used in home land-

scaping. Its low, shrub-like growth lends itself well to a delightful place in the landscape. Save it where you can.

This palm is difficult to transplant from the wild and slow growing from seed. This writer always removes the flesh or black shell from the seed, then soaks it in warm water for at least three days before planting them. Plant them in a medium such as Pro-Mix, or equal parts of peat moss and perlite, and keep it damp.

Should you be golfing on the golf course near Lake Lotela in Highlands County, and hit a ball into the scrub, go in search. You'll soon find yourself under tall pines among saw palmettos and this gem of gems: *Sabal etonia*. Forget your ball; enjoy etonia's beauty.

References:

Cultivated Palms, a special issue of the American Horticultural Magazine, Jan., 1961. Out of print.

Palms of the World, by James C. McCurrach

Palms of South Florida, George B. Stevenson, paperback

(The last two may be obtained from Fairchild Tropical Garden bookstore in Miami.)