

Ptychosperma elegans, Solitaire Palm¹

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Family

Areaceae, palm family.

Genus

Ptychosperma means “a folded seed” and comes from two Greek words: *ptycho*, or “a fold,” and *sperma*, or “seed.”

Species

The species name *elegans* is the Latin term for “graceful” or “elegant.”

Common Names

Solitaire Palm, Alexander Palm

This palm is commonly referred to as the solitaire palm because it grows with a single, solitary trunk.

Description

Solitaire palm is native to eastern Queensland, Australia where it occurs in coastal rainforests. In America, solitaire palm grows best where temperatures do not drop below 35°F because it is not very cold hardy. It prefers full sun to partial shade and can reach heights of 20 feet. The pinnately compound leaves or fronds can reach lengths of 6 to 8 feet and are attached to a 1-foot-long petiole or stem. They are dark green on the topside and gray-green on the underside. Leaflets are 2-foot-long, narrowly oblong blades that are bluntly squared and jagged at the tip. They grow opposite

from one another on the rachis, displaying a “V-shaped” appearance. The slim trunk grows to a maximum diameter of 4 inches, is light gray or almost white, and has dark leaf base scars that encircle the trunk and lighten in color with age. On top of the trunk sits a two foot tall olive-green crownshaft (from which the fronds emerge). The crownshaft has a bulging base and smooth waxy surface. The heavily branched, green-yellow inflorescences are 2 to 3 feet long and appear just below the crownshaft. Inflorescences produce white male and female flowers. Fruits are bright red, about one inch in diameter, and egg shaped.



Figure 1. The upper portion of several specimens of *Ptychosperma elegans*, showing the leaves, inflorescences, and maturing fruits. Credits: Scott Zona, CC BY 2.0

1. This document is FOR 251, one of a series of the School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date May 2010. Reviewed February 2022. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
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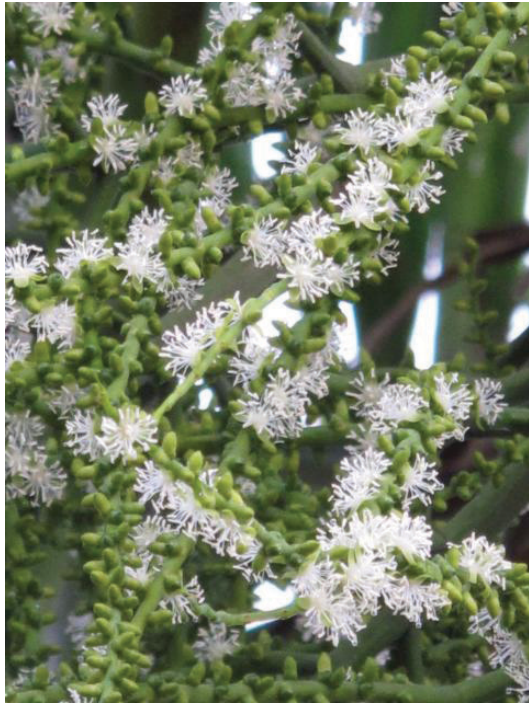


Figure 2. A close-up of the flowers of *Ptychosperma elegans*.
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Allergen

All members of this genus are considered to be moderately to highly allergenic.

Applications

Horticultural

The solitaire palm is a good specimen to use in small residential yards because it does not require much growing space. It exhibits fair growth in well-drained soils but grows best in more organic, nutrient-laden soils. While this palm needs little maintenance, it does require regular watering. Many choose to plant this palm in multiples of varying heights to create a fuller effect and a more interesting silhouette.

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