

# *Thrinax morrisii*: Key Thatch Palm<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This native North American palm slowly grows 20 to 35 feet tall, its smooth, slender trunk topped with 3.5-foot-wide, beautiful, green and silver fronds. The fronds are a shimmering silver/white underneath and are a source for thatch. The insignificant white or yellow spring flowers are followed by small, round, fleshy white or yellow fruits.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Leucothrinax morrisii*

**Pronunciation:** loo-ko-THRI-nax more-ISS-ee-eye

**Common name(s):** key thatch palm

**Family:** *Arecaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

**Origin:** native to Florida and the West Indies

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** native

**Uses:** deck or patio; container or planter; specimen; highway median

## Description

**Height:** 20 to 35 feet

**Spread:** 8 to 12 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** palm, upright/erect

**Crown density:** open

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** coarse



Figure 1. Full Form—*Leucothrinax morrisii*: key thatch palm

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Figure 2. Range

### Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** entire
- Leaf shape:** fan-shaped
- Leaf venation:** palmate
- Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen, evergreen
- Leaf blade length:** 18 to 24 inches
- Leaf color:** dark green to blue and shiny on top, silver to light green underneath
- Fall color:** no color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Leucothrinax morrisii*: key thatch palm



Figure 4. Leaf, Underside—*Leucothrinax morrisii*: key thatch palm

### Flower

- Flower color:** white or yellow
- Flower characteristics:** not showy; emerges in clusters on 3'–5' long, drooping, branched panicles
- Flowering:** spring and summer



Figure 5. Flower—*Leucothrinax morrisii*: key thatch palm



## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** ¼ to ½ inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** turns from white to yellow when ripe

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Fruiting:** spring to fall



Figure 6. Fruit—*Leucothrinax morrisii*: key thatch palm

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

**Bark:** light gray and smooth, often with remnant leaf bases and fibers just below the crown

**Pruning requirement:** little required

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** not applicable

**Current year twig thickness:**

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high



Figure 7. Bark—*Leucothrinax morrisii*: key thatch palm

Credits: Gitta Hasing

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** yes

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant

**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

## Use and Management

This palm is small enough to be popular in residential landscapes. It is often planted as a single specimen or in groups of three to accent an area. Due to the coarse texture, they make a nice entryway palm planted to attract attention to the front door of a building. It often looks best planted in a mulched area or in a bed with a low-growing ground cover.

Key thatch palm should be grown in full sun or partial shade and is highly drought- and salt-tolerant, making it ideal for seaside applications.

Propagation is by seed.

## Pests

No pests are of major concern.

## Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

## Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.