



# 2008

## plants of the year

By Marilyn Griffiths, Plant Records

As gardeners and plant lovers, we are always looking for new ideas for our landscapes. In South Florida, we are fortunate to have the choice of many tropical species. The Plants of the Year Committee has researched and discussed many of these plants in an effort to choose this year's winners.

Continuing in the plant introduction tradition of Dr. David Fairchild, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden would like to acquaint you with the 2008 Plants of the Year. Please look for them at Fairchild and consider them for use in your garden.

### **PLANTS OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Marilyn Griffiths, Chairperson; Harvey Bernstein, Mary Collins, Mike Davenport, Martha Kent, Jason Lopez, Ken Neugent.



## *Euphorbia punicea*

**Botanical name:** *Euphorbia punicea*

**Family:** Euphorbiaceae

**Common name:** Flame of Jamaica, Jamaican poinsettia

**Native to:** Jamaica

**Habit:** Evergreen shrub or small tree to 20'

**Flower:** On and off, throughout the year. Large bracts in shades of red surrounding a complex yellow flower structure.

**Fruit:** Usually green tinged with red, pop open when ripe.

**Growing conditions:** Full sun, well-drained soil

**Propagation:** Seeds, cuttings, air layers

**Comments:** Its sap may irritate the skin. Great for xeric gardens and is moderately salt tolerant. This species appears to vary slightly between populations, further study is needed.

*Euphorbia punicea*, known as the flame of Jamaica, is an evergreen succulent shrub to small tree found only on the sunny island of Jamaica. Although first described in 1788, *E. punicea* has yet to find its way into many South Florida gardens, even though it thrives on limestone, needs no irrigation and is a very light feeder. Its slow growth, upright habit and branching structure make pruning irrelevant. Flame of Jamaica has the potential to bloom almost year-round.

What we see as a flower show is actually an odd inflorescence surrounded by showy bracts, or modified leaves. These bracts can range in color from orangish-pink to scarlet to crimson red. Warblers and honey bees visit throughout the day, taking advantage of the abundant sweet nectar. Plant *Euphorbia punicea* in well-drained soil, or even a rocky hole with full exposure to the sun. Be patient. Like a fine wine it gets better with age. Plots 41c, 50 and 107



## *Myrcianthes fragrans*

**Botanical name:** *Myrcianthes fragrans*

**Family:** Myrtaceae

**Common name:** Simpson's stopper

**Native to:** South Florida & West Indies, Central America to northern South America

**Habit:** Evergreen shrub to tree 20' tall.

**Flower:** White, fragrant, to 1/2" diameter

**Fruit:** Red-orange, attractive to birds

**Growing conditions:** Well-drained soil in full sun to shade. Average water requirements.

**Propagation:** Seed

**Comments:** The small, deep green leaves contain aromatic oils with the fragrance of nutmeg. When in full sun, the leaves grow densely on the smooth-barked branches. When this plant is grown in shade, the foliage becomes less dense, and the trunk displays its attractive, smooth, mottled bark.

*Myrcianthes fragrans*, or Simpson's stopper, is a native of the hammocks of South Florida and Tropical America. This shrub or small tree grows to 20 feet tall. It makes a great hedge and is a low maintenance alternative to the commonly used ficus hedge. Simpson's stopper's silvery gray to warm brown bark naturally peels to reveal a smooth, burnished copper-colored inner layer.

Crush the small, slightly leathery leaves, and you will discover a pleasant aroma. Fragrant little white flowers are produced intermittently through the spring and summer. Showy red-orange fruit provide food for several bird species. Simpson's stopper will have a dense branching habit if grown in full sun. When grown in the shade, the foliage is less dense and the trunk displays its attractive, smooth, exfoliating bark. Plant one near a feeder or birdbath for shy birds such as painted buntings and cardinals to use as a safe haven. Plots: 3 and 46



## ***Coccothrinax argentata***

**Botanical name:** *Coccothrinax argentata*

**Family:** Arecaceae

**Common name:** Silver thatch palm

**Native to:** South Florida, southeastern Mexico, the Caribbean and Colombia

**Habit:** Slow growing, solitary palm to 15"

**Flower:** Small, creamy flowers borne on two-foot long inflorescence.

**Growing conditions:** Well-drained soil in full sun; thrives on limestone.

**Propagation:** Seed

**Comments:** This palm is especially salt and drought tolerant.

Watch *Coccothrinax argentata* as the undersides of its deep green leaves flash metallic silver on a breezy summer day, and you will know why it is one of Florida's native gems. It is small, but perfectly proportioned, with a five-foot wide canopy of fan leaves sitting atop a trunk that is six inches thick. In late summer, two-foot spikes laden with hundreds of small, creamy-white flowers hang down from within the canopy. They are reminiscent of a delicate fringe that might have hung from a lady's dress in olden days. Small, pearl-sized fruit follow the flowers, changing color from grassy green to dark purplish black.

Silver thatch palm is a small, slow-growing palm and perfect as a specimen plant in a patio garden. It invites its observer to come close and view its delicate details. It also looks wonderful grown as a uniform group in the larger garden or mixed with slash pine, coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*) and other Florida pine rockland plants. Plant it in the hottest spot in your garden, and watch it greedily absorb every ray of Florida sunshine. Salt spray is no problem either, as *C. argentata* grows naturally along coastline. Do not let its petite, delicate appearance fool you; it is tough as nails. The only thing that can kill it is too much shade and water. Plots 107 and 150 (Bailey Palm Glade)