

The Species of *Trachycarpus*

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In compiling a handbook on subtropical palms, the author has found that plants of *Trachycarpus* are frequently misnamed. The most widely grown species, *T. fortunei*, is usually identified correctly, but the names of other species are often misapplied in the popular literature, in nursery catalogs, and in gardens. The most authoritative monograph of the genus is that of Beccari (Asiatic palms—Corypheae, in *Annals of*

the Royal Botanic Garden, Calcutta, 13: 272–286. 1933). The general inaccessibility of this work and his earlier paper on the genus (in *Webbia* 1: 41–68. 1905) has been responsible for most of the confusion.

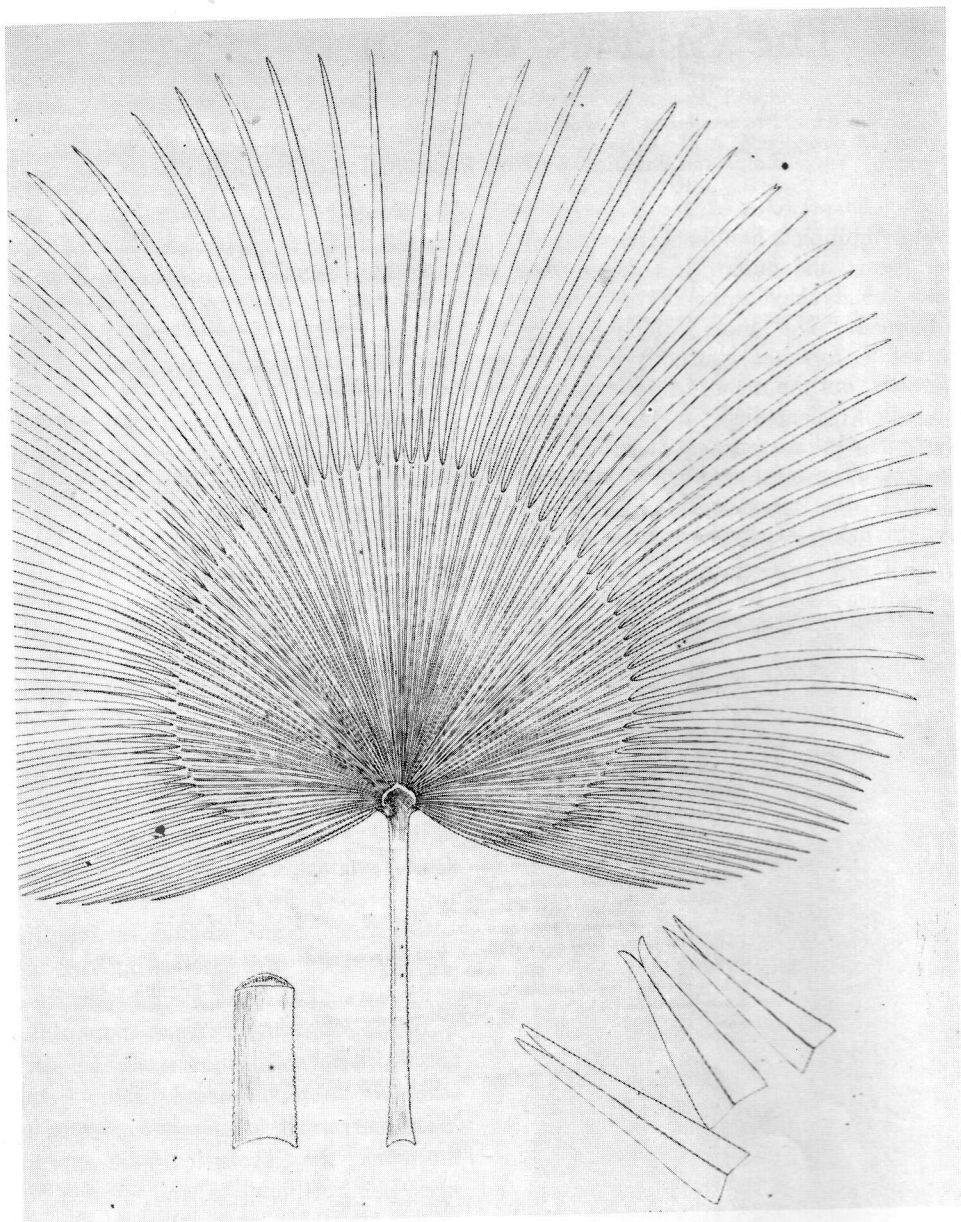
Although little of significance has been published on *Trachycarpus* since these works appeared, their age implies that new knowledge and present taxonomic standards would modify some of Beccari's conclusions. In particular, *Trachycarpus wagneranus* and *T. caespitosus* seem so closely allied to *T. fortunei* that they might better be reduced to varieties or cultivars of that species. The author would welcome any data that would clarify the status or variability of any of the species and would especially like to hear of plants of those that appear not to be in cultivation: *T. nanus*, *T. takil*, and *T. caespitosus*.

Cultivated plants should be identifiable by means of the following key and notes, as well as from the reproductions of the only known figures of three of the species. Characters most useful in identification are: the trunk fibers being loosely arranged or closely appressed to the trunk; the fibrous leaf-base appendages being ribbonlike and pendent or triangular and erect; the depth and equality of division in each leaf; and the shape of the fruit and seed.



1. *Trachycarpus caespitosus*, reproduced from *Bull. Soc. Tosc.ortic.* 40: 165. 1915.

- A. Depth of leaf division regular, leaf bases soon deciduous; fruit ovoid-oblong, seed longitudinally grooved on one side. *T. martianus*
- AA. Depth of leaf division irregular, leaf-bases long persistent on trunk; fruit globose-reniform, seed lacking longitudinal groove.



2. *Trachycarpus martianus* leaf, from Griffith, Palms of British India 1850.

- B. Trunk not, or barely, emerging above ground. _____ *T. nanus*
- BB. Trunk present above ground.
- C. Trunks multiple. _____ *T. caespitosus*
- CC. Trunk single.

- D. Leaf-blade 40–45 cm long, thick and leathery. *T. wagneranus*
 DD. Leaf-blade 50–85 cm long, stiff but thinner.
 E. Trunk fibers loose and ruffled; leaf base appendages ribbonlike, recurving; leaves divided more than halfway. *T. fortunei*
 EE. Trunk fibers closely appressed to trunk; leaf base appendages triangular, erect; leaves divided to about the middle. *T. takil*

Trachycarpus caespitosus

Becc. ex Roster

T. fortunei var. *surculosa* Henry ?

This species is still not recorded from the wild, having been described from plants in J. Harrison Wright's garden in Riverside, California, and in Lafayette Park in Los Angeles. It is the only multi-trunked species, with small and rigid leaves as in *T. wagneranus*, of which it may be only a variant. Figure 1 is the only published photo. The species is rare in cultivation, the original plants in California no longer existing. John Dransfield informs me that gardens in England contain several multitunked plants of *Trachycarpus* that may prove to be this species.

Trachycarpus fortunei

(Hook.) H. Wendl.

The common *T. fortunei* is characterized by loosely arranged trunk fibers, ribbonlike, pendent leaf-base appendages, and medium-sized leaf blades divided more than halfway. Plants of *T. fortunei* with a more glaucous leaf surface are often misnamed *T. martianus*.

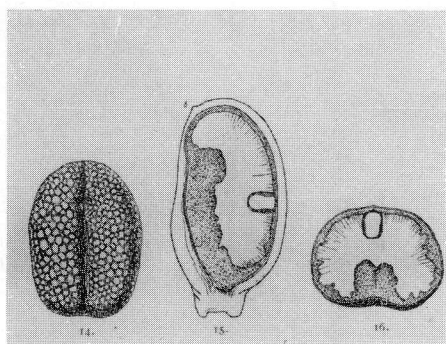
Trachycarpus martianus

(Wallich) H. Wendl.

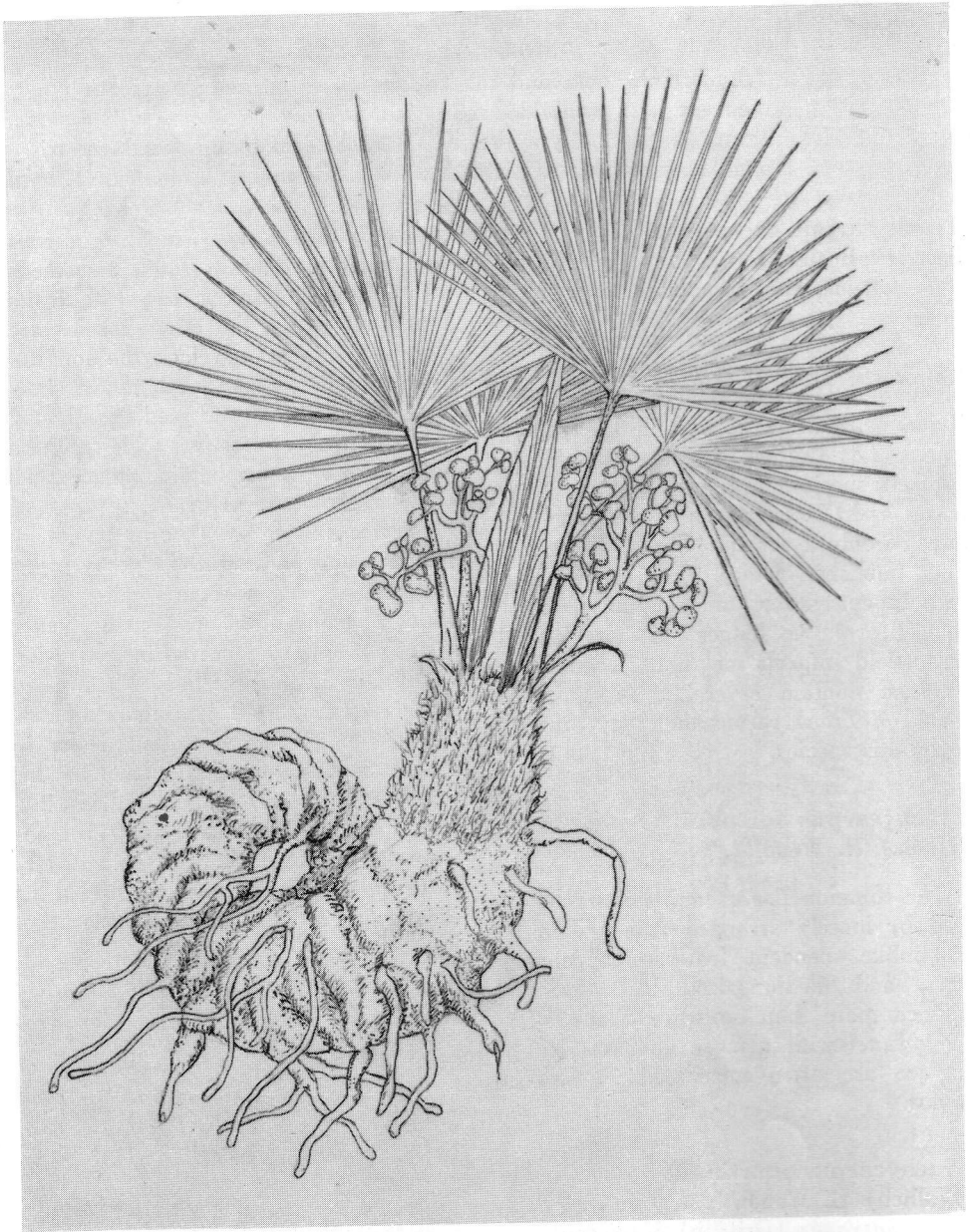
T. khasyanus (Griffith) H. Wendl.

One of the most distinct species, *T. martianus* has a trunk retaining the leaf bases only within a meter or so of the crown, fibers appressed rather closely to the trunk, broadly triangular leaf-base appendages, leaves that are divided very

evenly halfway and with a glaucous undersurface, oblong fruits, and seeds with a longitudinal groove (the fruits and seeds of all the other species are globose-reniform and lack the longitudinal groove). Figures 2 and 3 show the distinctive leaf and seed. Cultivated plants of true *T. martianus* are rare, the name usually being applied to an especially glaucous form of *T. fortunei*, as illustrated in the well-known books by Hertrich and McCurrach. *Trachycarpus martianus* is a handsome species with a wide range in India and Burma, yet it seems not to have appeared in cultivation in the U.S.A. until the late 1960's, when seeds were imported by Deigaard Nurseries from G. Ghose, a seed dealer in India. Several attractive plants of this importation are growing at the Huntington Botanical Gardens; in 1977 seeds were set on one plant with pollen of *T. fortunei* and these have confirmed its identity as *T. martianus*. On the other



3. *Trachycarpus martianus*, seed from rapheal side (14), fruit in vertical section (15), and seed in cross section (16), all \times ca. $1\frac{3}{4}$, from Beccari, Webbia 1: 67. 1905.

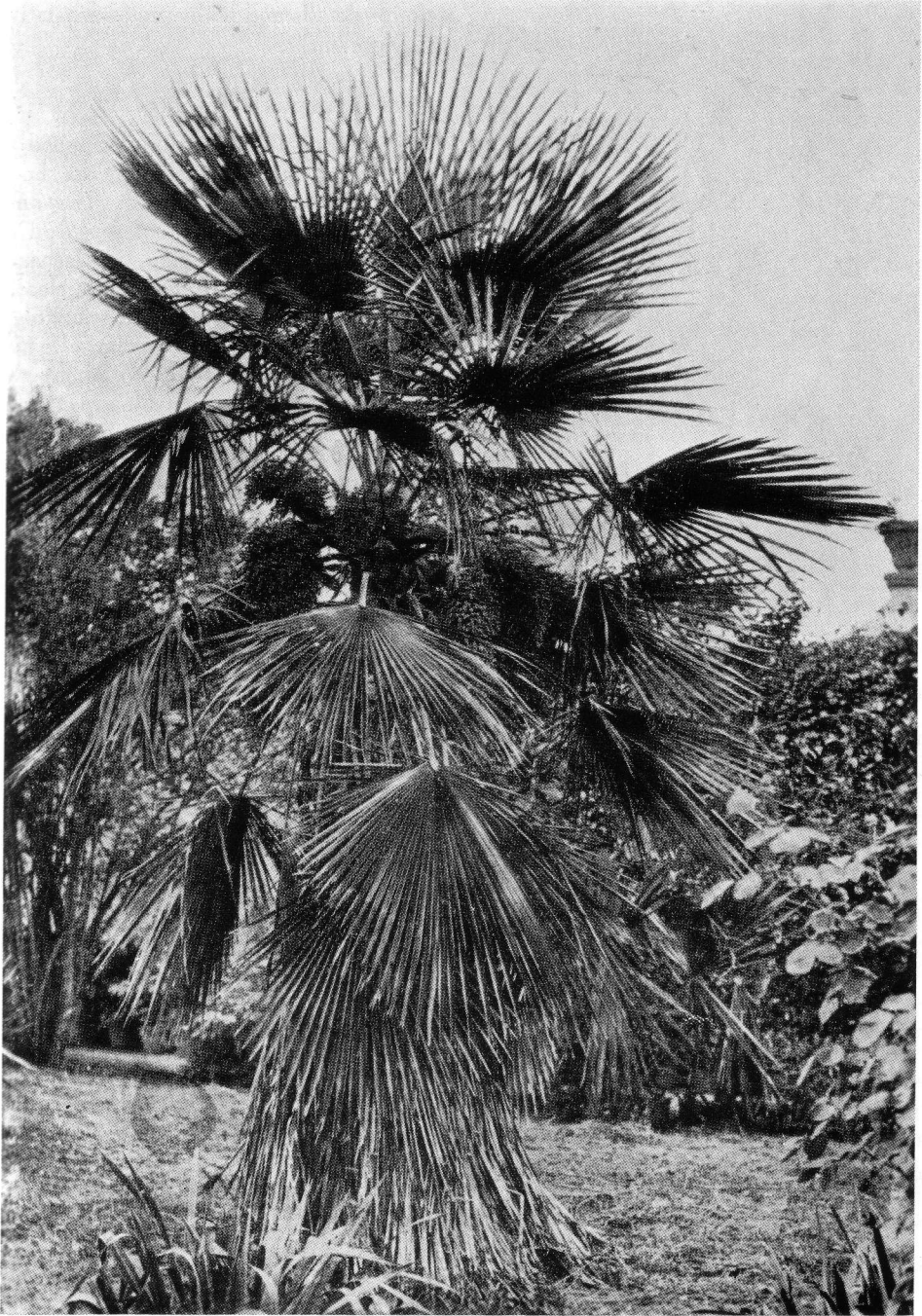


4. *Trachycarpus dracocephalus*, probably synonymous with *T. nanus*, redrawn by Lisa Pumpelly from a Xerox copy of plate LII in *Acta Phytotax. Sin.* 3. 1955.

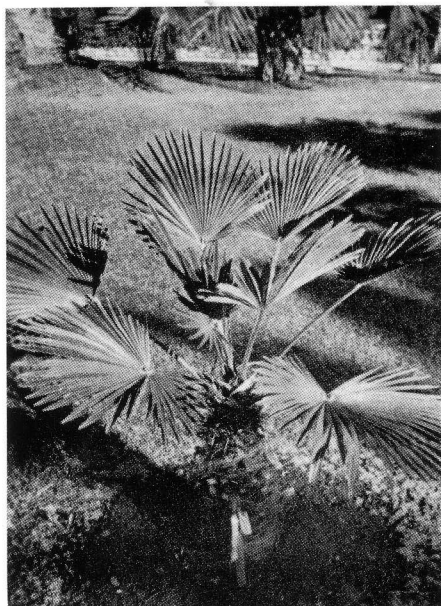
hand, seeds supposedly of this species were recently available from a foreign seed dealer but they lack the longitudinal groove.

***Trachycarpus nanus* Becc.**

The name *T. nanus* is ordinarily applied to the more dwarfed clones of *T. wagneranus*. However, true *T. nanus*



5. The type plant of *Trachycarpus takil*, from Kew Bull. 1912: facing p. 291, 1912.



6. *Trachycarpus wagneranus*, from Hertrich, Palms and cycads 93, 1951 (as *T. takil*).

has no appreciable aboveground stem. It is common in Yunnan, China, but has never been brought into cultivation nor has a photo or figure of it been published. A similar species is *T. dracocephalus* Ching & Hsu, with a rhizome that grows horizontally below the soil surface; its only published illustration has been redrawn as Figure 4. This species is probably a synonym of *T. nanus*, for the descriptions agree in

major details and both species are native to Yunnan.

***Trachycarpus takil* Becc.**

The name *T. takil* is often applied to plants of *T. wagneranus*—they are, however, very different species. The only published photo of *T. takil* is shown in Figure 5, showing a plant in Beccari's garden in Florence, Italy. It has closely appressed trunk fibers, short, triangular, erect leaf-base appendages, large leaves divided rather unevenly to about the middle, and reniform fruits. Unfortunately it is rare in cultivation and no plants of this species seem to be grown in the United States.

Trachycarpus wagneranus

Hort. ex Roster

This is the common species usually misnamed *T. takil* or *T. nanus*, with small, very rigid, leathery leaves divided irregularly to below the middle, loose trunk fibers, and ribbonlike, pendent leaf-base appendages. It is known only from cultivation. Figure 6 is of a young plant; with time the trunk may reach seven meters or more in height. The leaves are variable as to size and the trunk fibers more appressed in some clones. It is separable from *T. fortunei* mainly by its smaller, more rigid leaves and may only be a variant of that species.

CLASSIFIED

WANTED TO BUY: air parcel post-sized palm seedlings for beginning collection; also *Amherstia nobilis*. Lewis F. Knudsen. Jessups Estate, Nevis, West Indies.

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