

Extremely Rare and Endemic Beautiful Taxon Palm: *Trachycarpus takil* Becc.

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Abstract: This article offers a short describes on the Extremely Rare and Endemic Beautiful Taxon Palm, *Trachycarpus takil* Becc. [Academia Arena, 2009;1(5):81-82]. ISSN 1553-992X.

Kumaun Himalaya offers a unique platform for nurturing several endemic taxa and therefore is a type locality of these taxa. *Trachycarpus takil* Becc. is one of them, which is extremely rare in occurrence in wild state and has a specific habitat preference. *Trachycarpus takil* Becc. belonging to the family Areaceae (Palmae) which is a rare and endemic taxon of this Kumaun Himalaya having a very small population in wild state. However, by far no serious attempt towards its conservation has been undertaken. This species has been cultivated around Nainital and Ranikhet in Kumaun Himalaya by Britishers and explore the causes responsible for their being rare and threatened in the wild state. *Trachycarpus takil* Becc. is a cold temperate species for Palm family and grows in dense humid temperate forest between 2000-2700m altitude usually in association with *Alnus nepalensis*, *Quercus leucotricophora*, *Q. floribunda*, *Ilex dipyrena*, *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Lyonia ovalifolia*, *Betula ulnoides*, *Cupressus torulosa*, *Abies pindrow*, *Persea duthiei* etc. It usually prefers north and northwestern aspects in hilly slope on moist humus rich soil having localized natural population. The wild adults population of this palm species appears to be extremely rare and highly threatened. Four adults tree have been recorded from near Bhatkot, two from Munsiri proper and less than a dozen from Kalamuni-Betulidhar near Munsiri, two from Thalkedar near Pithoragrah town. In India, this species is available under cultivation in U.P. Sate Horticulture Garden, at Florence, Italy and has been introduced along with Caucasus coast of the Black sea region of erstwhile USSR and along West Coast highway of Mexico. It is a medium sized tree, 8-10m tall, trunks clothed with tightly clasping network of coarse fibers, leaves large, 1-2cm long, persistent, old on withering, but not falling off, reflexed irregularly divided upto the middle, glaucous beneath, petiole slender, 1-1.2m long, subtrigonal, flower glomerulate, minute, hyaline, fruits reniform, brownish black, flowers from April to May and fruits from September to October. It is a very handsome and elegant tree.

Trachycarpus is a genus of eight species of palms native to Asia, from the Himalaya east to eastern China. They are fan palms (Areaceae tribe Corypheae), with the leaves with a bare petiole terminating in a rounded fan of numerous leaflets. The leaf bases produce persistent fibers that often give the trunk a characteristic hairy appearance. All species are dioecious, with male and female flowers produced on separate plants although female plants will sometimes produce male flowers, allowing occasional self-pollination.

The most common species in cultivation is *Trachycarpus fortunei* (Chusan Palm or Windmill Palm), a temperate palm which is, in cultivated range, probably the northernmost palm species in the world, having been successfully grown in such cool and damp but relatively mild locales such as Scotland, southwestern Norway, extreme southwestern Utah, coastal New Jersey and the panhandle of Alaska. It is frequent in gardens in the United Kingdom and Ireland, along the Atlantic coast of France and northern Spain, in southern and coastal Poland, in southern Switzerland and northern Italy, and in the Pacific Northwest of North America. The dwarf form known as "*Trachycarpus wagnerianus*" is unknown in the wild, and is considered to be a synonym of *T. fortunei* (Kew palms checklist). It resembles that species closely, differing mainly in its smaller and much stiffer leaves. Hybrids between them are reportedly intermediate in size and fully fertile. *Trachycarpus takil* (the Kumaon Palm) is similar to *T. fortunei*; it is probably slightly less tolerant of cold. Other species less common in cultivation are *T. geminisetus*, *T. princeps*, *T. latisetus*, *T. martianus*, *T. nanus* and *T. oreophilus*. *T. martianus* and *T. latisetus* do not tolerate cold as well as *T. fortunei*, *T. takil* or *T. wagnerianus*. *T. geminisetus*, *T. princeps* and *T. oreophilus* are still too rare and small in cultivation to assess their full potential.

The trunk fibres produced by the leaf sheaths of *Trachycarpus fortunei* are harvested in China and elsewhere to make coarse but very strong rope, brooms and brushes. This use gives rise to the old alternative name "Hemp-palm". The fibrous leaf sheaths are also frequently used to clothe stems of artificial palms. This genus is very popular among palm enthusiasts for its ability to withstand cold,

especially in the form of damp, cool summer weather with relatively mild winter weather. These palms often tolerate snow in their native habitats and are the hardiest trunking palms. Often palm is used as beautiful ornamental plant. *Trachycarpus* species are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species including *Paysandisia archon* (recorded on *T. fortunei*).

The species has become critically rare and highly vulnerable due to ruthless deforestation causing fragmentation of natural habitat. For the conservation measure, Prof. Y.P.S. Pangtey, F.N.A.Sc. in his recently concluded project produced 5000 seedlings of temperate palm and these were distributed throughout the Uttarakhand to make an effort for its survival.



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