MAY 2012

weed watch™

YOUR ALERT TO NEW AND EMERGING THREATS.

1. *Habit with immature fruit.* ***2.*** *Leaf bases and bright green crownshaft.* ***3.*** *Young plants.* ***4.*** *Silvery-grey leaf undersides.*

TREE

Alexander palm (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*)

Introduced | Native | Not Declared

Alexander palm is an attractive plant native to the rainforests of northern Queensland. It is widely grown as a garden and street tree and is extremely common in cultivation in south-eastern Queensland. It has been widely promoted in recent times as a replacement for the invasive Cocos palm (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*).

Distribution

Alexander palm is native to the coastal parts of northern and central Queensland (i.e. from Bathurst Bay on the Cape York Peninsula south to Baffle Creek near Gladstone). It is becoming naturalised in south-eastern Queensland, with records from the Greater Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast regions. There are also unconfirmed reports of it becoming naturalised in the coastal districts of northern New South Wales.

Description

A large palm tree with a single trunk growing up to 30 m tall, and with a crown that contains a cluster of about 10-12 very large leaves. The grey trunk is up to 30 cm or more thick and ringed with noticeable leaf scars. The leaves are 3.5-4.5 m long on mature trees and have 60-80 narrow leaflets on each side. The base of the leaf stalk forms a sheath-like structure around the top of the trunk (i.e. a crownshaft) that is up to 1 m long and bright green or light green in colour. The leaflets (up to 80 cm long and 3-5 cm wide) have dark green upper surfaces and paler whitish-green or silvery-grey undersides.

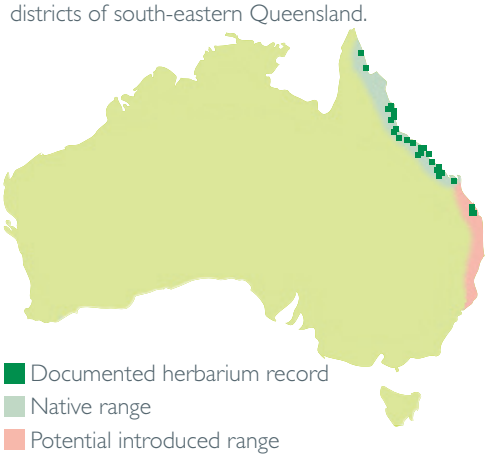
The large flower clusters are mostly white or cream in colour and are initially enclosed in three green bracts (up to 80 cm long and 12 cm wide). These clusters (50-100 cm long) are borne on thick stalks up to 15 cm long and have numerous upright to drooping branches. The stalkless flowers are borne in threes along the flowering branches, each group having a single female flower and two male flowers. The round or egg-shaped fruit (8-14 mm long and 6-11 mm wide) turn from green to bright red as they mature. These fruit lose their fleshy red outer covering as they age, exposing a fibrous brown under-surface.

Quick Facts

- A tall palm with a single grey trunk up to 30 m tall
- Bright green or light green sheath-like structure around the top of the trunk
- Massive leaves have dark green upper surfaces and silvery-grey under sides
- Large branched flower clusters that are mostly cream in colour
- Rounded fruit (8-14 mm long) that turn bright red as they mature

Habitat

In its native habitat, in northern Queensland, this species is generally confined to lowland swamps, drainage lines and rainforest vegetation along waterways. It is an emerging weed of waterways and riparian vegetation in the wetter coastal districts of south-eastern Queensland.



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1. *Infestation along a creek in northern Brisbane.* **2.** *Cluster of mature fruit.*

Reproduction and Dispersal

This species reproduces only by seed. The relatively small fruit are presumably dispersed by birds, bats and other animals. However, they are probably also spread by water (particularly down suburban drains) and in dumped garden waste.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

Alexander palm is spreading from cultivation and is beginning to invade waterways and riparian areas in sub-tropical regions. Trees produce large quantities of seeds, which are spread by birds and other animals into natural areas, and readily germinate in wet environments. Alexander palm is already present along waterways in many parts of Brisbane and south-eastern Queensland, but is most common along wetter and more shaded creeks and in remnant rainforest areas. Most of the naturalised plants have not yet reached maturity, however the large numbers present at some locations indicate that the rate of invasion is quite rapid.

A similar pattern of invasion has also recently been reported in Hawaii, where Alexander palm is invading roadsides, gullies, and streambeds in the wetter parts of the main island.

Control Methods

Small plants can be pulled out by hand, while larger saplings and trees may be cut down. No herbicide is required, as cutting this palm below the crown will kill the plant (i.e. it will not regenerate from the base).

Look a-likes

Alexander palm is very similar to Bangalow palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*), which is native to south-eastern Queensland and coastal NSW. However, the leaf undersides of Alexander palm are silvery-grey in colour while those of Bangalow palm are pale green and have scaly outgrowths. Alexander palm also has a bright green or light green crownshaft, while in Bangalow palm it is dark green, brownish-green or dull purplish-green in colour.

Top. *Close-up of green leaf undersides showing tiny scaly outgrowths.*
Bottom. *Flower cluster and brownish-green crownshaft*

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