

## *Cold Hardy Crotons*

own. If you don't have room for these, propagate them for others who do. The last hard freeze in Florida occurred in February of 1996. Tampa International Airport got down to 25 degrees, and in inland regions the temperatures deteriorated even further. When looking for cuttings, search out larger plants that may have been planted several years ago. If they are in an exposed area, all the better, as they evidently are pretty tough to have made it this long. Those planted next to a house may have also taken a good deal of cold, but possibly less wind. Look at the amount of northern exposure. Inquire as to whether they were covered or not; most aren't.

The varieties listed below are common in landscapes, partially due to their hardiness. The further you venture from the coast, the more these will become the dominant Crotons. Be on the lookout for other varieties that have also survived. No doubt clones of certain varieties can be found inland, even though that type may not normally be associated with hardiness. Sports take on obvious new characteristics and some of these may be rather subtle. Additional hardiness may be found in a branch that may otherwise appear normal. Crotons have been grown outdoors in Central and Southern Florida for over 100 years and many cuttings have changed hands. Who knows what you will find and what you can perpetuate by passing them on to new collectors. Future generations will thank you.

**Stewartii** – A broad, semi-oak leaf, green with irregular splashes of bright yellow, with pink midrib and stem. Leaves can be either primarily green, or primarily yellow, and everything in between. The yellow is frequently asymmetrical on the leaf, adding interest to the landscape. There are many full, attractive specimens across Florida. This is the hardiest Croton.

**Bravo** – A broad semi-oak leaf that usually has "shoulders" half way up. This variety often sports, but plants typically have pale yellowish veining on the green new leaves, with pink or red on the darker older growth. This is one of the parents of Norma. It has fared well in Central Florida yards over the years.

**Norma** – A broad leaf. One of the parents of Petra, and is similar to it, except that the colors are more in blotches and the veins are less distinct. Often has red shades.

**Mortii** – A shiny, green, narrow leaf that has varying amounts of yellow veining. A nice-looking plant when given enough sun to color up.

**Andreanum** – Green with bold yellow veins that change to orange as the leaves age. The leaves are large and longer than wide, and often makes a lush plant. An early hybrid with Veitchii as one of its parents. Very common. |

**Christiana** – Leaves are long and narrow with yellow and orange.

**Aureo Maculatum** – A small-leaved Croton with dense foliage. The shiny green leaves are splashed with varying amounts of bright yellow. There are many large specimens in Tampa.

Additionally, there are large, established specimens of other varieties to be found throughout Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, such as Stoplight and Mrs. Iceton. Their survival would indicate a certain hardiness. Future articles will investigate these & other varieties.

## Companion Plants

### Palms for Central Florida

Those individuals who grow crotons in their landscape often have other tropical companion plants to create an overall effect. Certainly a variety of forms, colors, and textures enriches a yard more than a group of one type of plant. Palms are widely used because of their height, fast growth, and loose crown, making these ideal canopies for crotons and other understory plantings. The tropical association of palms adds to the beauty. Many true trees have large, dense crowns which create heavy shade that can prevent other plant growth, except near the outer edges. Palms also survive high winds and hurricanes better than almost any other plants.

Although palms are primarily tropical plants, perhaps 10% of the 2,000+ species can be grown in the warm temperate areas of Central Florida. Those collectors fortunate to live near the coasts may approach a subtropical climate and expand their species appreciably. Palms do not produce wood, and by definition are not actually trees. Instead, their trunks are made up of bundles of strong fibers. Also, unlike trees, death is almost inevitable if the meristem is damaged or removed.

Palm fronds are either pinnate (feather-like), or palmate (leaflets radiating from a single point). Many of the cold-tolerant species are native to areas with prolonged dry seasons and therefore have well-developed spines along the leaf stems