

# *Cordyline petiolaris* Broad Leaved Palm Lily

## Description

*Cordyline petiolaris* (syn: *Cordyline terminalis* var. *petiolaris*) is a medium-sized palm-like, strappy, understory plant, growing to a maximum of 5 metres in height in its natural habitat.

It is an Australian native plant, endemic to the east coast rain forests of northern NSW and southern Queensland.

The mid-green leaves are long - up to a metre - and around 15 cm wide. It can be multi-trunked.

It has white or lilac small flowers in late winter to early spring. These are followed by spectacular panicles of red berries which can persist for many months. The berries attract attention at this time of year under the large *Araucaria bidwillii* that is a focus of our Twenty First Century Garden.

*Cordyline petiolaris* is one of several Australian native *Cordyline*s.

## Name and classification

'*Cordyline*' is from the Greek 'Kordyle', which means 'club'. Some sources say this refers to the large underground rhizomes of the genus; others say this refers to swellings on the trunks of some species.

'*Petiolaris*' means 'stalked', and refers to the long stalks on the flowers (and berry panicles).

*Cordyline*s were once commonly classified in the Liliaceae family, while other botanists placed them in the Agavaceae family. They are now formally placed in the Asparagaceae family.

## Further information of interest

*Cordyline*s are of special interest to Australians because they link us to the South Pacific. All of the 15 to 20 classified species are from the South Pacific and its rim: Eastern Australian coast, South East Asia, New Guinea, Norfolk Island, New Zealand, Polynesia, and one species in South America. This suggests, perhaps, ocean current dispersal of the genus.



*Cordyline petiolaris*. C21 Garden, GBG. Above: June 2018. Photo: CC. Below and over page: Jan 2018. Photo: DJ.





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We have the well-known New Zealand tree, *Cordyline australis*, in the Geelong Botanic Gardens in the lawn east of the Tea House. Polynesian peoples cultivated (and probably spread) *Cordyline fruticosa* and ate its rhizomes. The berries of *Cordyline petiolaris* are supposed to be edible, but Cranbourne Botanic Gardens urges caution! Colin Campbell of Gardening Australia claims that Cordylines are 'water wise' plants: they can shut down in drought conditions and wait for rain to start growing again.

**Summary**

Family: Asparagaceae, Subfamily: Lomandroideae

Species: *Cordyline petiolaris*

**References**

Wikipedia, plantnet.rgbsyd.nsw.gov.au, Australian Plants Online,

Wrigley, John W. and Murray Fagg Australian Native Plants (Sydney: Reed New Holland, 2003) p.298,

Australian Native Plants Society (online),

Cranbourne Botanic Gardens (online)

