

NEEDLE PALM

Rhapidophyllum hystrix (Pursh) H. Wendl. &

Drude ex Drude

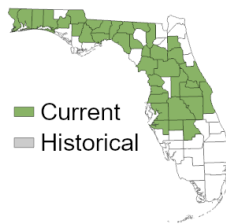
Synonyms: none

Family: Arecaceae (palm)

FNAI Ranks: G4/S4

Legal Status: US-none; FL-Commercially

Exploited



Leaves palmate, dark green above and silvery below. Growing along canal at Spring Creek Unit of Big Bend Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.

Field Description: Shrubby **palm** with long needle-like **spines** on a trunk that can reach 1 m in height but is usually much shorter. **Leaves** are large, with rounded fronds about 0.8 m long, shiny green on the upper surface and pale silvery-green beneath. **Leaf stalks** to 1 m long. **Fruiting stalks** are short and borne on the trunk among the sharp needles.

Similar Species: Young plants without trunk can be distinguished from saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) by a lack of saw teeth on the leaf stems, and from bluestem palmetto (*Sabal minor*) by having a leaf stalk that ends at the base of the leaf blade (rather than continuing partly into the leaf blade).

Related Rare Species: There are no other closely related rare species in Florida.

needle palm

Rhapidophyllum hystrix

Habitat: Rich woods often where limestone is near the surface; slope forests, upland hardwood forests, hydric hammocks, and bottomland forests.

Best Survey Season: Identifiable all year.

Range-wide Distribution: Southeast SC (Beaufort and Jasper counties) south to central peninsular FL (Highlands), and west to southern MS.

Conservation Status: A monotypic genus; a shrub of the southeastern coastal plain. Apparently secure in Florida, but listed as commercially exploited. Quite common in the appropriate habitats within north Florida and the panhandle mainly threatened by forestry practices.

Protection and Management: Requires rich, undisturbed hardwood forests. Actively manage invasive plant species.

References: Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2024, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011.



Short inflorescence located at base of plant. Flowers yellow to green in color. Upland hardwood forest at Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area.
Photo by Kelly Anderson.



Base of plant with conspicuous needle-like spines 10 - 50 cm long. Hydric hammock at Aucilla Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.



Growing on slope of upland hardwood forest at Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.