

Ornamental Palms for Central Florida¹

R. J. Black²

Palms add a tropical image to central Florida's landscape. Adapted palms can be selected for most locations in Florida. Favorable climatic conditions make the successful outdoor culture of many different species possible.

Palms are available for landscaping in many sizes and forms, from large majestic trees to small shrubs. Many palms have single trunks, but multiple-trunk forms can add interest to the landscape. Small palms with delicate foliage and multiple-trunk palms can be used for natural plantings. Palms can be selected with either feather (pinnate) or fan-shaped (palmate) leaves.

Selection and Use

Many palms are available for landscaping homes, parks, streets, and commercial buildings. Palms are used in the landscape as specimens, border plants, patio trees, and street plantings. Specimen plants used individually have a distinctive or majestic quality that attracts immediate interest. For use in border plantings, palms require dense foliage to screen or fill an area. Smaller species that are reasonably free of litter are excellent for patios. Large palms used for street plantings should be able to

survive with little maintenance once established. Many palms can be grown indoors as well as outdoors.

Table 1 includes palms that are well adapted to central Florida. Selection should be based on the intended use and characteristics of the site. Palms selected for coastal sites need to have salt spray tolerance. Careful study of the list of palms and their characteristics will allow selection of the right palm for the landscape needs.

Lethal Yellowing

Increasing numbers of palm species are suspected of being susceptible to a disease called lethal yellowing (LY). The first occurrence of LY in Florida was reported in Key West, and it has since spread to many southern counties. Efforts continue to prevent the spread of LY into central and north Florida. Although LY has been especially devastating to the coconut palm, other palms have exhibited varying degrees of susceptibility to LY. A complete list of susceptible palms can be obtained by contacting your local county extension office. Some palms recommended in this fact sheet are moderately susceptible and their susceptibility will be noted in the chart.

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Planting

Palms should be planted and cared for properly to insure that they will be healthy and attractive. Palms may be planted during any season of the year, but the warm, rainy summer months are best. Palms from nurseries are often in containers, and little loss or setback occurs when the soil ball remains intact during the transplanting.

Follow the steps below when planting a palm:

1. Dig the hole wide enough to accept the root ball easily and provide at least several inches of new growth from the ball. It need only be deep enough to situate the palm at the same depth at which it grew previously.
2. The amending of backfill soil from the planting hole is not recommended.
3. Gently place the palm straight in the hole and fill around the ball with unamended soil. Water thoroughly to remove any air pockets.
4. Form a basin with soil at the periphery of the root ball to retain water during irrigation.
5. Mulch with a 2- to 3-inch layer of organic material to buffer soil temperature, conserve moisture, and reduce weed competition.
6. Support large palms with braces to maintain stability during the first 6 to 8 months after planting. Nails should not be driven directly into a palm trunk.
7. Water daily for the first few weeks and frequently thereafter until palms are well established.
8. A light application of partially slow-release "palm special" fertilizer can be banded at the margin of the root ball 3 to 4 months after transplanting.

Fertilizing

Palms' nutritional requirements are different from those of other landscape plants.. Established palms should be fertilized with a 4-1-6-2 Mg (N-P₂O₅-K₂O-Mg) ratio fertilizer (for example, a

fertilizer marked "8-2-12-4 Mg"). Fertilizer should contain equivalent percentages of the controlled-release forms of N, K₂O, and Mg. Because palms are highly prone to several potentially fatal micronutrient deficiencies, any fertilizer applied to them should contain 1 to 2 percent iron and manganese, plus trace amounts of zinc, copper, and boron, to prevent these deficiencies.

Table 1. Selected Palms for Central Florida

Common Name Scientific Name	Type of Leaves	Height Range	Growth Habit	Adaptability				How Palms Are Used					
				Soil Type	Salt tol. ¹	Specimen	Borders or Base	Indoor	Patio	Roadside	Seaside		
Australian fan palm <i>Livistona australis</i>	Fan-shaped	40 to 80 feet	Single stemmed, fairly hardy	Grows best on rich, moist areas	N	X	X				X		
Remarks: Looks like Chinese fan palm but taller.													
Broad-leaf lady palm <i>Rhapis excelsa</i>	Fan-shaped	8 to 10 feet	Low-growing shrub type of clump palm	Moist, semi-shaded areas best	N	X	X	X					
Remarks: Slow grower; excellent patio or container palm; plant in sites which offer protection from cold.													
Butia palm <i>Butia capitata</i>	Feather-shaped	10 to 20 feet	Heavy trunks, low-growers, bluish-gray leaves	Very adaptable	M	X	X			X	X		X
Remarks: Slow grower; needs space to develop.													
Cabbage palm <i>Sabal palmetto</i>	Fan-shaped	30 to 60 feet	Erect tree; heavy trunk	Very adaptable; wet to dry	H	X	X				X		X
Remarks: Florida's official state tree; very numerous; excellent native palm; transplants easily.													
Canary Island date palm (LY) ² <i>Phoenix canariensis</i>	Feather-shaped	30 to 60 feet	Stocky, single massive trunk.	Grows best on well drained site	M	X					X		
Remarks: Too large for residential plantings; often shows magnesium deficiency.													

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California Washington <i>Washingtonia filifera</i>	Fan-shaped	50 to 60 feet	Tall, stiff, erect tree	Very adaptable	M	X						X		
Remarks: Good for street plantings.														
Date palm (LY) ² <i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>	Feather- shaped	30 to 40 feet	Tall, erect; gray-green leaves	Well drained	M	X						X		
Remarks: Too large for most lots; fruit seldom found in Florida.														
Dwarf palmetto <i>Sabal minor</i>	Fan-shaped	3 to 6 feet	Stemless shrub	Variable; best in moist sites	H		X							X
Remarks: Seldom used; native palm with bluish color; difficult to transplant.														
European fan palm <i>Chamaerops humilis</i>	Fan-shaped	2 to 5 feet (Rare 15 feet)	Clump growing, dwarf	Tolerates many kinds of soils	H	X	X		X					X
Remarks: Slow grower; excellent small palm for homes.														
Gru-gru <i>Acrocomia totai</i>	Feather- shaped	45 feet	Thorny, straight trunk	Tolerates many kinds of soils	M	X						X		
Remarks: Many thorns on trunk.														

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Hispaniolan palmetto <i>Sabal domingensis</i>	Fan-shaped	35 to 60 feet	Stout, heavy trunk; very large leaves	Thrives on sandy soil	H	X					X			X
Remarks: Much larger and heavier than our cabbage palm; seldom available.														
Mexican Washington <i>Washingtonia robusta</i>	Fan-shaped	60 to 80 feet	Very tall erect palm	Very adaptable	M	X						X		
Remarks: Leaves clothe the trunk; good for street plantings.														
Needle palm <i>Rhapidophyllum hystrix</i>	Fan-shaped	3 to 5 feet (Rare 10 feet)	Low-growing reclining trunk; clumps or single trunk	Fertile, moist soils and shade	M	X	X				X			
Remarks: Slow grower but excellent small native palm; very cold hardy; needles could be dangerous to small children.														
Puerto Rico hat palm <i>Sabal causiarum</i>	Fan-shaped	30 to 40 feet	Very massive; huge leaves.	Grows well on sandy soils	H	X						X		X
Remarks: Too large for most homesites.														

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Saw palmetto <i>Serenoa repens</i>	Fan-shaped	3 to 4 feet	Shrub; twisted. recumbent trunk; some upright types	Extremely adaptable	H		X	X						X
Remarks: Excellent small native palm but very difficult to transplant.														
Slender lady palm <i>Rhapis humilis</i>	Fan-shaped	6 to 8 feet	Low growing, clump type	Moist, semi-shaded area is best	H	X	X	X						X
Remarks: Slow grower, excellent patio palm.														
Wild date palm (LY) ² <i>Phoenix sylvestris</i>	Feather- shaped	60 to 80 feet	Base roots often exposed	Variable	M	X						X		
Remarks: Looks like Canary Islands date palm (seldom available).														
Windmill palm (LY) ² <i>Trachycarpus fortunei</i>	Fan-shaped	5 to 10 feet (Rare 20 feet)	Slender, erect, solitary trunk	Very adaptable	H	X	X				X			X
Remarks: Very cold hardy; excellent palm.														