

Sabal etonia Scrub Palmetto¹

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Introduction

The scrub palmetto, along with the dwarf palmetto, has a subterranean stem that is frequently S-shaped or contorted; the crown bud is held below the soil surface. The height of this palm varies from 3 to 4 feet, and there are generally 5 to 8 living palm leaves present at any given time. The leaf blades are simple with deep, palmate lobes and bifurcate (Y-shaped split) tips. The inflorescence is half as long or as long as the leaves and bears small, white flowers in the spring. The flowers are followed by small, shiny black berries.

General Information

Scientific name: *Sabal etonia*

Pronunciation: SAY-bull ee-TOE-nee-uh

Common name(s): scrub palmetto

Family: *Palmae*

Plant type: palm

USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 1)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: accent; border

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 3 to 6 feet

Spread: 3 to 5 feet

Plant habit: palm; round

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate



Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed

Leaf shape: star-shaped

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

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Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: black

Fruit characteristic: attracts birds

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: usually with one stem/trunk; not particularly showy

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

The scrub palmetto is not common in the trade but could be used in the landscape as a massed ground cover. They are especially effective in the shade of existing pine trees. One or two could be planted in a small landscape as specimens to add texture to the garden.

This palm, like the dwarf palmetto, should have a full sun to partial shade position in the landscape. The plant is adaptable to many soil types as long as they are well-drained, and it is drought tolerant.

The scrub palmetto is propagated from the small, dark brown seeds found inside the black fruits.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.