

***Cocos nucifera*: Coconut Palm¹**

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Introduction

The Coconut Palm is one of man's most useful plants. The heavy crown of long flowing fronds and gently curved trunks lend a tropical effect to any landscape setting in which they can grow. A beautiful street tree, Coconut Palm is also ideal as a background tree, framing tree, or as a striking freestanding specimen. Coconut Palms located along streets, walkways or near patios require pruning to remove the flowers or developing fruit so it doesn't fall and cause injury or property damage.

General Information

Scientific name: *Cocos nucifera*

Pronunciation: KOE-koase noo-SIFF-er-uh

Common name(s): Coconut Palm

Family: *Areaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: sidewalk cutout (tree pit); reclamation; urban tolerant; fruit; specimen; street without sidewalk; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median

Availability: not native to North America

Description

Height: 50 to 60 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: palm, upright/erect

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound

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Figure 1. Middle-aged *Cocos nucifera*: Coconut Palm

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches

Leaf color: green, yellow

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval, round

Fruit length: 6 to 12 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown, green, yellow

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: not applicable

Current year twig thickness:

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases



Figure 2. Range

Use and Management

Due to the widespread devastation of lethal yellowing disease, use the resistant Malayan strains, often called dwarf or pygmy coconuts, and labelled yellow, golden, red, and green, according to the color of their fruits, such as 'Golden Malayan Dwarf'. The Malayan palms are very similar to the Jamaican Tall except for having straight trunks. The red strain is the most rugged of the three but has the least attractive foliage. The variety 'Maypan', a hybrid of Malayan x Panama Tall, has the most robust and rapid growth yet retains its resistance to lethal yellowing disease. All Coconut Palms are highly salt-tolerant and make nice street trees if planted when they are tall enough. Be aware that falling fruit can damage vehicles or hit pedestrians and the flower stalks (in spring) or developing fruit (summer) may need to be removed.

Coconut Palms grow in full sun on any well-drained soils. Plants respond well to being fertilized.

Propagation is by seed. The large coconuts, with outer husk, should be half-buried on their side in soil. Germination can take many months.

Pests

Nematodes may infest this palm.

Diseases

Lethal yellowing disease, virus diseases, and fungi all affect Coconut Palms. Be sure to only plant selections which are resistant to lethal yellowing disease. Ganoderma butt rot can infect the lower trunk and roots, and can kill the palm. Avoid injury to the palm in this area. There is no control for butt rot, only prevention.

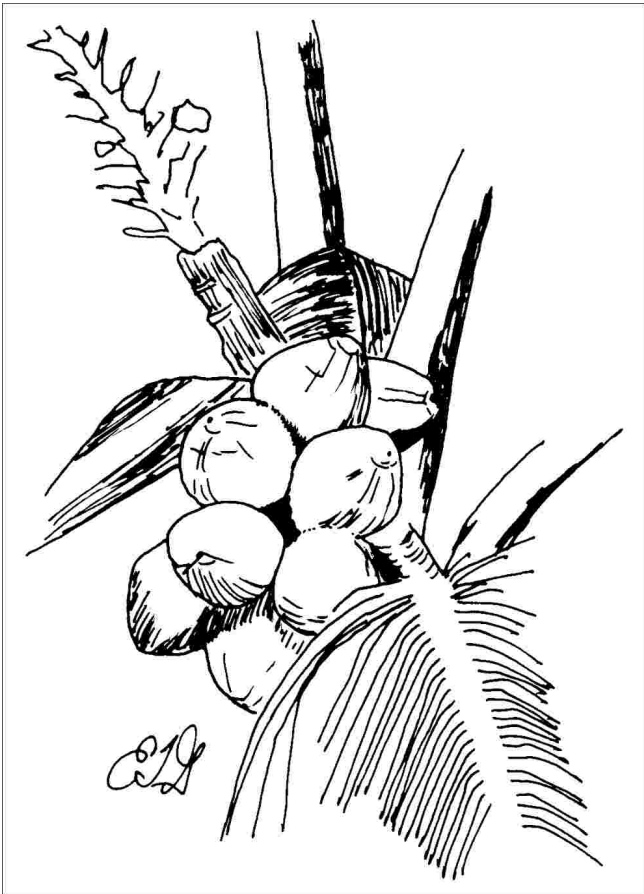


Figure 3. Fruit