Introduction

This upright, fine-textured evergreen tree grows very slowly up to 30 feet in height but rarely exceeds 10 feet. A distinctive plant, ponytail palm has a greatly swollen trunk base (sometimes to seven feet across) that narrowly tapers and eventually branches in older specimens. The light green leaves, up to five feet long and 3/4 of an inch wide, are produced in tufts clustered at the tips of branches. The cascading nature of the leaves gives much the appearance of a pony’s tail. Creamy yellow flowers are quite showy as they are held above the foliage in spring or summer for several weeks. The tree will occasionally flower two or even three times a year. This plant makes a great conversation piece, whether grown as a specimen, a container plant, near patios, or placed in rock gardens. It can also be used as a houseplant.

General Information

Scientific name: Beaucarnea recurvata
Pronunciation: boe-KAR-nee-uh reck-er-VAY-tuh
Common name(s): Ponytail
Family: Agavaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: indoors; specimen; container or planter; deck or patio
Availability: not native to North America

Figure 1. Mature Beaucarnea recurvata: Ponytail
Credits: Ed Gilman

Description

Height: 12 to 18 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: palm, upright/erect
Crown density: open
Growth rate: slow
Texture: fine
**Beaucarnea recurvata: Ponytail**

**Foliage**
- **Leaf arrangement:** spiral
- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** serrate
- **Leaf shape:** linear
- **Leaf venation:** parallel
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** 18 to 36 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**
- **Flower color:** white/cream/gray, yellow
- **Flower characteristics:** very showy

**Fruit**
- **Fruit shape:** elongated
- **Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- **Fruit covering:** dry or hard
- **Fruit color:** unknown
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**
- **Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don’t droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
- **Pruning requirement:** little required
- **Breakage:** resistant
- **Current year twig color:** gray
- **Current year twig thickness:** very thick
- **Wood specific gravity:** unknown

**Culture**
- **Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun, or partial shade

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained
**Drought tolerance:** high
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

**Other**
- **Roots:** not a problem
- **Winter interest:** no
- **Outstanding tree:** no
- **Ozone sensitivity:** unknown
- **Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown
- **Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

**Use and Management**
Ponytail palm grows in full sun or partial shade on a wide range of soils. Soil must have good drainage as plants have a tendency to develop root rot on poorly drained soils. Plants moved from indoors to permanent outside locations should be gradually exposed to the increase in light and temperature change.

Propagation is by seed, which usually must be imported from Mexico.

**Pests**
Chewing insects may disfigure the leaves.

**Diseases**
Root rots can kill plants grown on wet soils.