**Sabal minor** Bluestem Palmetto, Dwarf Palmetto

Edward F. Gilman

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**Introduction**

The bluestem palmetto has a trunk that, in Florida, rarely emerges from the ground and rarely produces side shoots (Fig. 1). *Sabal minor* is reported to have reached 18 feet tall in Texas. Height appears to be governed by genetic origin, ranging from 3 to 8 feet tall in Florida. The dark green, costapalmate leaves vary in size depending on the age of the plant but may reach a length of 5 feet. The fan-shaped leaves of the bluestem palmetto are palmately lobed and segmented with the segments split to 2/3 their length. The leaves of this palm are green to bluish-green in color, and the petioles are unarmed. The inflorescences of this palm exceed the length of the leaves and bear small, white flowers that are strongly fragrant. The summer flowers are followed by small, shiny black fruit.

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**General Information**

- **Scientific name**: *Sabal minor*
- **Pronunciation**: SAY-bull MY-ner
- **Common name(s)**: dwarf palmetto, bluestem palmetto
- **Family**: Palmae
- **Plant type**: palm
- **USDA hardiness zones**: 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)
- **Planting month for zone 7**: year round
- **Planting month for zone 8**: year round
- **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

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**Description**

Height: 2 to 7 feet  
Spread: 3 to 5 feet  
Plant habit: palm; upright  
Plant density: open  
Growth rate: slow  
Texture: coarse

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate  
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: blue or blue-green  
Fall color: no fall color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**

Flower color: white  
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; pleasant fragrance

**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: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single 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; occasionally wet  
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**

Bluestem palmetto will perform quite well as a specimen in a small garden. Its large leaves and small size make it stand out in the company of other plants. It is also impressive when massed as a tall ground cover. Plant shrubs 4 to 6 feet apart to establish a dense ground cover.

*Sabal minor* is valued for its hardiness and tropical appearance. It must 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. These palms will even grow well on relatively shallow soils.

This palm is readily propagated from seed.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.