

# *Livistona decipiens*, Ribbon Fan Palm<sup>1</sup>

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## Family

Arecaceae, palm family.

## Genus

*Livistona* is the Latin term for “Livingston,” the Scottish city where in 1670 Patrick Murray, a gardener and nobleman, helped found the Edinburgh Botanic Garden with his collection of plants.

## Species

The name *decipiens*, Latin for “deceiving” or “deceptive,” is thought to have been applied to this palm after discovering that it had been misidentified and cultivated in France as another plant species.

## Common Name

### Ribbon Fan Palm

The common name of this palm comes from the physiological characteristics of its leaves, which split into many segments or lobes from the middle of the leaf and look like ribbons dangling from a hand-held fan.

## Description

This palm is endemic to Australia and grows along forest edges and coastal swamps in eastern Queensland. In the United States, it can survive where temperatures do not drop below 20°F, such as in parts of Florida, Texas, Arizona,

and California. It prefers full sun but can tolerate partial shade, and it can reach heights of 30 to 50 feet. Leaves are costapalmate, which means that they have a prominent mid-vein and a common point on the leaf where it lobes or splits. The split occurs in the middle of the leaf and continues to its tip. The area below the split is the part that resembles a hand-held fan. Individual leaves are large with widths ranging from 7 to 9 feet. Each leaf can reach a length of 4 to 6 feet and is attached to a 6-foot petiole that is armed with short, sharp teeth along its margin. Leaves are dark green on their topside and grayish green on their underside. The trunk is light brown with dense leaf base scars encircling it and can reach a diameter of up to 10 inches. Male and female flowers appear on branching flower inflorescences that emerge among the leaves. The inflorescences are 4 to 9 feet long and bear yellow blooms. The fruit is 1/2 inch to 5/8 inches in diameter and turns black when ripe.

## Allergen

Members of this genus cause minimal to no allergies.

## Applications

### Horticultural

The ribbon fan palm is a tall and stately tree with draping leaves that can add a graceful touch to any yard. It can be planted as a single specimen but is more striking if planted in groups of three. The ribbon fan palm is tolerant to drought and grows on a wide variety of well-drained soils,

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but it grows fastest and looks healthiest when it is watered regularly. Though it can survive indoors when given plenty of light and space, it is best to grow this palm outdoors.

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Figure 1. Close-up of the crown of *Livistona decipiens* showing the dangling leaf tips.

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Figure 2. Mature specimen of *Livistona decipiens* growing in Gainesville, Florida.

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