

# ***Beaucarnea recurvata*: Ponytail Palm<sup>1</sup>**

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, Andrew K. Koeser, Deborah R. Hilbert, and Drew C. McLean<sup>2</sup>

## **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 dark 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 palm

**Family:** *Asparagaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10A through 11 (Figure 2)

**Origin:** native to Belize, Guatemala, and southeastern Mexico



Figure 1. Full Form - *Beaucarnea recurvata*: ponytail palm  
Credits: UF/IFAS

1. This document is ENH252, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, Gainesville, FL 32611; Andrew K. Koeser, assistant professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center (GCREC), Wimauma, FL 33598; Deborah R. Hilbert, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; and Drew C. McLean, biological scientist, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** not assessed/  
incomplete assessment

**Uses:** indoors; specimen; container or planter; deck or patio



Figure 2. Range

## 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

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** whorled

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** serrate

**Leaf shape:** linear

**Leaf venation:** parallel

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 1 ½ to 5 feet

**Leaf color:** dark green

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** creamy yellow

**Flower characteristics:** very showy; emerges in clusters on  
3' long panicles

**Flowering:** spring and summer

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** ½ inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard; 3-winged capsule



Figure 3. Leaf - *Beaucarnea recurvata*: ponytail palm  
Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 4. Flower - *Beaucarnea recurvata*: ponytail palm  
Credits: UF/IFAS



**Fruit color:** reddish-tinged

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



Figure 5. Fruit - *Beaucarnea recurvata*: ponytail palm  
Credits: UF/IFAS

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches don't droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns



Figure 6. Bark - *Beaucarnea recurvata*: ponytail palm  
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

**Bark:** brown, smooth, with previous years' leaf scars along the trunk, and an extremely swollen or buttressed base that fissures with age

**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 to 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.

## References

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.