

Caryota mitis: Fishtail Palm¹

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Introduction

This clump-growing group of palms has medium green leaf blades which are divided into many segments, each of which resembles the tail of a fancy goldfish. Rarely exceeding 25 feet in height, a number of species of fishtail palms produce suckers from the base creating a very attractive specimen palm. Its neat habit makes it ideal for use at poolside, in urns or other containers, and it is often seen in well-lit interiorscapes where its distinct form lends a tropical effect. It can be used as a house plant in large homes with plenty of light.

General Information

Scientific name: *Caryota mitis*

Pronunciation: kair-ee-OH-tuh MIT-iss

Common name(s): Fishtail palm

Family: *Arecaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to southeast Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (South); not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central)

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



Figure 1. Full Form—*Caryota mitis*: Fishtail Palm

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 15 to 25 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: palm, upright/erect
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: incised
Leaf shape: obovate; narrowly triangular
Leaf venation: reticulate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 8 feet; secondary leaflets are 6 inches
Leaf color: medium green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: purplish
Flower characteristics: not showy; emerges in clusters on 2' long, branched spikes

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: ½ inch
Fruit covering: berry
Fruit color: reddish-black
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem



Figure 3. Leaf—*Caryota mitis*: Fishtail palm



Figure 4. Fruit—*Caryota mitis*: Fishtail palm

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns
Bark: gray, smooth, and covered in leaf sheaths
Pruning requirement: little required
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: not applicable
Current year twig thickness:
Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 5. Bark—*Caryota mitis*: Fishtail palm
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to full shade

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Fishtail palms can thrive in light conditions from full sun to deep shade, requiring only that its soil be well-drained and reasonably fertile. It has a moderate to rapid growth rate and should be located outdoors in a sheltered location protected from cold. Unfortunately, the palm is susceptible to lethal yellowing disease. In addition, it is monocarpic so a stem dies after it flowers. This stem must be removed to maintain a neat appearance. There are a variety of other species grown in south Florida nurseries.

Propagation is by seeds or division.

Pests

Red spider mites and scales are serious problems, especially when fishtail palms are used indoors.

Diseases

Lethal yellowing disease.

Reference

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