

Dypsis lutescens: Yellow Butterfly Palm¹

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Introduction

This graceful, clump-growing palm reaches 20 to 30 feet in height with a spread of 8 to 10 feet. The gently arching, 4- to 6-inch-wide, ringed, bamboo-like, green, multiple trunks are topped with curved, feathery, yellow-green fronds. Known under a variety of names, this beautiful soft palm is quite valued throughout the tropics and is widely planted in frost-free areas. The small, white, inconspicuous flowers are produced all year long on 3-foot stalks among the leaves, and the small, oblong, black fruits ripen all year. Yellow butterfly palm makes an attractive specimen, screening, or poolside planting, but it is overused.

General Information

Scientific name: *Dypsis lutescens*

Pronunciation: dip-sis loo-TESS-enz

Common name(s): Yellow butterfly palm, bamboo palm, areca palm

Family: *Arecaceae*

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

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (South); not considered a



Figure 1. Mature *Dypsis lutescens*: Yellow butterfly palm.
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central)

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

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 20 to 30 feet

Spread: 8 to 10 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: palm, upright/erect, vase

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral

Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 12 to 18 inches, 18 to 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval, round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: black, brown, red

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: not applicable

Current year twig thickness:

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun, or partial shade; shade tolerant

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Yellow butterfly palm prefers fertile, well-drained, acid soil. If growth in full sun, it makes an excellent specimen or screen (on 4-foot centers), but can be grown in the dense shade of patios and porches (or as house plants). Small palms benefit from some shade until they are several feet tall, and palms should be watered during periods of drought. They require regular fertilizer applications to maintain a good appearance. Young palms in full sun and those in high pH soils develop yellow leaves. Older leaves on plants of any age become chlorotic, frequently from a deficiency of potassium. Affected leaves are often speckled with bronze or yellow. Yellow butterfly palm is moderately salt-tolerant.

Propagation is by seeds or division.

Pests

Scales followed by sooty-mold can be a problem for yellow butterfly palm.

Diseases

Ganoderma root rot, potassium deficiency on older leaves.