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ENH60

Ornamental Palms for Central Florida [1]

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Palms add a tropical image to central Florida's landscape. Adapted palms can be selected for most locations in Florida. Favorable climatic conditions make the successful outdoor culture of many different species possible.

Palms are available for landscaping in many sizes and forms, from large majestic trees to small shrubs. Many palms have single trunks, but multiple-trunk forms can add interest to the landscape. Small palms with delicate foliage and multiple-trunk palms can be used for natural plantings. Palms can be selected with either feather (pinnate) or fan-shaped (palmate) leaves.

Selection and Use

Many palms are available for landscaping homes, parks, streets, and commercial buildings. Palms are used in the landscape as specimens, border plants, patio trees, and street plantings. Specimen plants used individually have a distinctive or majestic quality that attracts immediate interest. For use in border plantings, palms require dense foliage to screen or fill an area. Smaller species that are reasonably free of litter are excellent for patios. Large palms used for street plantings should be able to survive with little maintenance once established. Many palms can be grown indoors as well as out-doors.

Table 1 includes palms that are well adapted to central Florida. Selection should be based on the intended use and characteristics of the site. Palms selected for coastal sites need to have salt spray tolerance. Careful study of the list of palms and their characteristics will allow selection of the right palm for the landscape needs.

Lethal Yellowing

Increasing numbers of palm species are suspected of being susceptible to a disease called lethal yellowing (LY). The first occurrence of LY in Florida was reported in Key West, and it has since spread to many southern counties. Efforts continue to prevent the spread of LY into central and north Florida. Although LY has been especially devastating to the coconut palm, other palms have exhibited varying degrees of susceptibility to LY. A complete list of susceptible palms can be obtained by contacting your local county extension office. Some palms recommended in this fact sheet are moderately susceptible and their susceptibility will be noted in the chart.

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Planting

Palms should be planted and cared for properly to insure that they will be healthy and attractive. Palms may be planted during any season of the year, but the warm, rainy summer months are best. Palms from nurseries are often in containers, and little loss or setback occurs when the soil ball remains intact during the transplanting.

Follow the steps below when planting a palm:

1. Dig the hole wide enough to easily accept the root ball and provide at least several inches of new growth from the ball. It need only be deep enough to situate the palm at the same depth at which it previously grew.
2. The amending of backfill soil from the planting hole is not recommended.
3. Gently place the palm straight in the hole and fill around the ball with unamended soil. Water thoroughly to remove any air pockets.
4. Form a basin with soil at the periphery of the root ball to retain water during irrigation.
5. Mulch with 2-to 3-inch layer of organic material to buffer soil temperature, conserve moisture, and reduce weed competition.
6. Support large palms with braces to maintain stability during the first 6 to 8 months after planting. Nails should not be driven directly into a palm trunk.
7. Water daily for the first few weeks and frequently thereafter until palms are well established.
8. A light application of partially slow-release "palm special" fertilizer can be banded at the margin of the root ball 3 to 4 months after transplanting.

Fertilizing

Regular fertilization is necessary for best palm growth. Mature palms should receive a complete granular fertilizer formulated for palms ("palm special") four times per year at a rate of 5 to 8 pounds each application. For palms under 8 feet tall, apply 2 to 5 pounds of fertilizer. Broadcast the fertilizer under the canopy of the palm but not up against the trunk where newly emerging roots may be injured.

Table 1. Selected Palms for Central Florida

				Adaptability		How Palms Are Used					
Common Names*Scientific Names*	Type of Leaves	Height Range	Growth Habit	Soil Type	Salt Tol.[1]	Specimen	Borders or Base	In-door	Patio	Road-side	Sea-side
Australian Fan Palm, *Livistona australis*	Fan-shaped	40 to 80'(12.1 to 24.2m)	Single stemmed, fairly hardy	Grows best on rich, moist areas	N	X	X			X	
Remarks: Looks like Chinese Fan Palm but taller											
Broad-leaf Lady Palm, *Rhapis excelsa*	Fan-shaped	8 to 10' (2.4 to 3.0m)	Low- growing shrub type of clump palm	Moist, semi-shaded areas best	N	X	X	X	X		
Remarks: Slow grower; excellent patio or container palm; plant in sites which offer protection from cold											
Butia Palm, *Butia capitata*	Feather-shaped	10 to 20' (3.0 to 6.1m)	Heavy trunks, low-growers, bluish-gray leaves	Very adaptable	M	X	X		X	X	X
Remarks: Slow grower; needs space to develop											
Cabbage Palm, *Sabal palmetto*	Fan-shaped	30 to 60' (9.1 to 18.2m)	Erect tree; heavy trunk	Very adaptable; wet to dry	H	X	X			X	X
Remarks: Florida's official state tree; very numerous; excellent native palm; transplants easily											
Canary Island DatePalm (LY)[2], *Phoenix canariensis*	Feather-shaped	30 to 60'(9.1 to 18.2m)	Stocky, single massive trunk.	Grows best on well-drained site	M	X				X	
Remarks: Too large for residential plantings; often shows magnesium deficiency											

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California Washington, *Washingtonia filifera*	Fan-shaped	50 to 60' (15.2 to 18.2m)	Tall, stiff, erect tree	Very adaptable	M	X				X	
Remarks: Good for street plantings											
Chinese Fan-palm (LY), *Livistona chinensis*	Fan-shaped	30' to 40' (9.1 to 12.1m)	Heavy trunk	Fairly adaptable	M	X			X	X	
Remarks: Slow grower until trunk well formed; plant in sites which offer protection from cold											
Date Palm (LY), *Phoenix dactylifera*	Feather-shaped	30 to 40' (9.1 to 12.1m)	Tall, erect; gray-green leaves	Well-drained	M	X				X	
Remarks: Too large for most lots; fruit seldom found in Florida											
Dwarf Palmetto, *Sabal minor*	Fan-shaped	3 to 6' (0.9 to 1.8m)	Stemless shrub	Variable; best in moist sites	H		X				X
Remarks: Seldom used; native palm with bluish color; difficult to transplant											
European Fan Palm, *Chamaerops humilis*	Fan-shaped	2 to 5' (0.6 to 1.5m) (Rare 15') (4.5m)	Clump growing, dwarf	Tolerates many kinds of soils	H	X	X	X	X		X
Remarks: Slow grower; excellent small palm for homes											
Gru-Gru, *Acrocomia totai*	Feather-shaped	45' (13.6)	Thorny, straight trunk	Tolerates many kinds of soils	M	X				X	
Remarks: Many thorns on trunk											

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Hispaniolan Palmetto, *Sabal domingensis*	Fan-shaped	35 to 60' (10.6 to 18.2m)	Stout, heavy trunk; very large leaves	Thrives on sandy soil	H	X				X	X
Remarks: Much larger and heavier than our cabbage palm; seldom available											
Mexican Washington, *Washingtonia robusta*	Fan-shaped	60 to 80' (18.2 to 24.2m)	Very tall erect palm	Very adaptable	M	X				X	
Remarks: Leaves clothe the trunk; good for street plantings											
Needle Palm, *Rhapidophyllum hystrix*	Fan-shaped	3 to 5' (0.9 to 1.5m) (Rare 10') (3.0m)	Low-growing reclining trunk; clumps or single trunk	Fertile, moist soils and shade	M	X	X		X		
Remarks: Slow grower but excellent small native palm; very cold hardy; needles could be dangerous to small children											
Puerto Rico Hat Palm, *Sabal causiarum*	Fan-shaped	30 to 40' (9.1 to 12.1 m)	Very massive; huge leaves.	Grows well on sandy soils	H	X				X	X
Remarks: Too large for most homesites											
Queen Palm, *Arecastrum remanzoffianum*	Feather-shaped	25 to 35' (7.6 to 10.6)	Fast growing	Well adapted	M	X		X	X	X	
Remarks: Beautiful palm; cold damaged in Gainesville; susceptible to manganese deficiency (frizzle top)											
Saw Palmetto, *Serenoa repens*	Fan-shaped	3 to 4' (0.9 to 1.2m)	Shrub; twisted. recumbent trunk; some upright types	Extremely adaptable	H		X	X	X		X
Remarks: Excellent small native palm but very difficult to transplant											

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Senegal Date Palm (LY) , *Phoenix reclinata*	Feather-shaped	20 to 25' (6.1 to 7.6m)	Multiple trunk; clump palm	Well-drained	M	X					
Remarks: Too large for many homes; plant in sites which offer protection from cold											
Slender Lady Palm, *Rhapis humilis*	Fan-shaped	6 to 8' (1.8 to 2.4m)	Low growing, clump type	Moist, semi-shaded area is best	H	X	X	X	X		X
Remarks: Slow grower, excellent patio palm											
Wild Date Palm (LY), *Phoenix sylvestris*	Feather-shaped	60 to 80' (18.2 to 24.2m)	Base roots often exposed	Variable	M	X				X	
Remarks: Looks like Canary Islands Date palm; (seldom available)											
Windmill Palm (LY), *Trachycarpus fortunei*	Fan-shaped	5 to 10' (1.5 to 3.0m) (Rare-20') (6.1 m)	Slender, erect, solitary trunk	Very adaptable	H	X	X		X		X
Remarks: Very cold hardy; excellent palm											

[1] Salt Spray Tolerance (Salt Tol.): **H** - Highly salt tolerant; may be used in exposed areas near shore line; **M** - Moderately; if near shore must be protected; **L** - Low, must be used in well-protected areas back from shore; **N** - No salt tolerance or salt tolerance. Unknown.

[2] LY - Palms moderately susceptible to lethal yellowing.