



PALMS FOR SOUTHERN NEVADA

STARNOTE 400
June 2009

Proven varieties for desert landscapes

Palms have long been a favorite of desert gardeners, commercial enterprises and homeowners. They make striking accents and give a tropical look to desert and traditional landscapes. Some varieties are planted as single specimens, some in accent clumps and others make excellent potted subjects for yard or patio. The following paragraphs cover when and how to plant palms, how to maintain them and which ones have proven track records in our climate.

PLANTING PALMS. The culture of palms is relatively simple. They can be planted throughout the year but establish more quickly during our warm season. The optimum time for planting and transplanting palms is April through September. This is especially true for large specimens, or cold tender varieties. Palms prefer their own planting areas, free from grass lawns, but most varieties will do fine in sloped lawn areas with excellent drainage. Like most other shrubs and trees planted in our climate, palms benefit from good soil preparation.

PREPARING THE SOIL & PLANTING. Palms will tolerate a wide variety of conditions but establish and grow much better in amended, well-drained soil. Mix 1 part *Paydirt™ Planting Mix* to 2 parts native soil. Add *Dr. Q's® Gold Dust Starter Fertilizer* per package instructions. Plant container palms so the top of the root ball is level with top of the planting area. See StarNote 001, *Planting Guide*, for detailed planting instructions. For bare root palms, the original soil line on the trunk will indicate proper planting depth. Staking or other supports may be needed until a new root system has established. The only benefit for leaving the fronds tied up is reduced wind resistance.

WATERING. Once established, most palms will tolerate drought, but thrive and grow with regular, deep watering. Remember to cut back watering frequency in winter when the soil is cold and palms are not growing actively. Don't let sprinklers hit the trunk or erosion of tissue will eventually destabilize the palm and cause it to break. Yellowed palm fronds, or fronds with yellow and brown spots, are good indicators of improper watering.

FERTILIZING. Fertilize ONLY DURING SUMMER with a specialty palm fertilizer, like *Dr. Q's® Palm Tree Food*, containing slow-release nitrogen, magnesium and manganese. Bright yellow bands on outer parts of palm fronds indicate a magnesium deficiency. Manganese deficiency usually shows as stunted, distorted new growth that may be yellow when it first emerges. Some palms also show spotting on the fronds. A nitrogen deficiency reveals itself in overall light green frond color, with the older fronds showing the lightest color. Feed your palms 2 or 3 times a year from May through September.

MAINTENANCE. Remove palm fronds only when they have turned completely brown. Summer is usually the best time to prune. You can remove old fronds and fruit stalks at the same time. Don't prune in late fall or winter. Old fronds give the crown additional protection from cold weather. When transplanting palms, pull the fronds up and tie them securely to protect the crown from drying out. Remove ties when new growth begins. Skinning is the process of removing frond collars from the trunk. Use a utility knife or similar tool to do this. Score the bottom of the frond collar and it will pop right off the trunk. Don't skin palms during winter.

POPULAR PALM VARIETIES: These are varieties most often planted successfully in Southern Nevada.

California Fan Palm (*Washingtonia filifera*). Native to California and Arizona, this palm has a wider, heavier trunk than the Mexican Fan. It grows slowly to 40 feet or more with a spread of 15 feet. The green foliage has noticeable threads or filaments projecting from the frond margins. Due to its massive size, the California Fan Palm is an excellent accent for large landscapes. Don't force this one into a small area or it will cause problems as it grows to maturity. Very tolerant of extreme summer heat, it is arguably the hardiest of large palms and accepts cold to about 10°.

Canary Island Date Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*). This large, graceful palm grows slowly and develops a pineapple-shaped base, eventually reaching 30 feet or more in height with a 18 foot spread. Tight fronds are a deep, shiny green with spiny tips when young, becoming more open and fountain-shaped with softer tips as the palm matures. Large, hanging sprays of yellowish flowers produce clusters of edible fruit. Another big palm, give it plenty of room and lots of water. Because of very slow growth., young plants make good pot subjects for several years. Foliage is damaged around 20°, but palm will survive and recover.

Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*). Much taller, more slender and open than its Canary Island relative with stiffer, gray-green foliage. Eventually reaches 50 feet in height. Commercial date variety of Southern California. Its natural habit is multi-trunked so suckers frequently appear from base. Watch out for thorns that line the base of fronds. Interesting accent in large desert landscapes. Fronds are killed at 20° but palm usually recovers.

Mediterranean Fan Palm (*Chamaerops humilis*). Tough, a slow-growing palm it is ideally suited for all landscape areas, large and small. It reaches a height of 12-15 feet with a crown of 6 feet or more. Foliage is bluish green on top and silvery green beneath, producing a shimmering effect in the wind. It naturally produces many trunks and left untrimmed resembles a large “palm bush.” Fronds are edged with sharp thorns. This palm makes a striking addition to pool, pond or fountain areas as well as an outstanding container plant. It’s drought and wind resistant and has survived temperatures as low as 5°.

Mexican Blue Fan Palm (*Brahea armata*). Beautiful accent palm has waxy, silvery-blue fronds that retain their color until parallel with the trunk. Excellent dry landscape specimen! Very slow growing to 30 feet or so, it has a crown of 8 to 12 feet and produces stalks of fragrant, creamy white flowers in spring. The “Blue” takes drought, heat and wind extremely well and tolerates freezing temperatures to about 18°.

Mexican Fan Palm (*Washingtonia robusta*). This graceful southwest native is perhaps the most frequently planted palm in Southern Nevada. It’s a slender-trunked, rapidly growing palm with bright green, fan-like foliage. It quickly grows to 40 feet and eventually can reach 80 feet in height and sports a compact, 7 to 12 foot wide head. Interesting curves sometime develop in trunks of older plants and clusters of palms planted at different angles produce unusual effects. This palm takes drought and poor soil but grows faster and nicer with better conditions. Tolerates 20° temperatures but suffers frond damage. Palm usually recovers. Watch out for sharp thorns on fronds!

Pigmy Date Palm (*Phoenix roebelenii*). Interesting, fine-leaved variety makes an excellent potted palm for house or patio. Plant grows slowly to 6 feet or more with a soft, dense crown. Give it regular water, avoid intense afternoon sun and cover or bring indoors to protect from freezing temperatures. Best inside with bright, indirect light. Use an all-purpose potting mix when transplanting.

Pindo Palm (*Butia capitata*). Graceful, hardy palm with feathery, strongly arching, gray green leaves. Develops a heavy, strongly patterned trunk which is very attractive when frond stems are trimmed to the same length. Grows slowly to 10-15 feet with a crown spreading to about 15 feet at maturity. Females bear large clusters of edible fruit with a pineapple-like flavor. Excellent landscape accent. Give it average water, and control soil pH (use sulfur products); hardy to about 15°.

Sago Palm (*Cycas revoluta*). Not actually a “Palm” – so DO NOT fertilize in summer. Has smooth, airy fronds resembling ferns mark this beautiful, very unusual plant. It grows very slowly to about 10 feet and looks like a palm as it ages, but is actually a primitive, cone-bearing plant related to the conifers. It has survived, virtually unchanged for millions of years. Long, feathery leaves grow from top of trunk. Pups at base can be transplanted. Excellent container plant; gives a nice tropical look. Keep out of afternoon sun; water deeply and infrequently. Protect from severe cold. Hardy to about 20°.

Windmill Palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei* or *Chamaerops excelsa*). This palm is extremely well suited for Southern Nevada landscapes. Named for stiff, windmill-shaped fronds, it’s compact, handsome and makes an excellent accent, screen or container subject. It grows slowly to about 15 feet with a 7-8 foot crown; dense, hairy fibers cover the trunk. Will accept regular water but does just fine with deep, widely spaced irrigation once established. Looks best when kept from high winds; tolerates extreme heat; hardy to 10°.