



*Above, left to right, Bismarck palm, Canary Island date palm, True Date Palm, Everglades palm.*

## ***TIME TO PLANT PALMS!***

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Question: When should I plant palms? How should I plant them? What varieties are good for this area and which ones should I avoid?

The best time to plant palms is after the last frost in the spring. This gives palms time to get established before the heat of summer. Many stores do not begin stocking palms until March or April so plant as soon as they are available. Palms that are grown in containers can be easily planted. However, this does not apply to palms that are being relocated. Only relocate palms that have developed a trunk.

Palms that have not developed a trunk are difficult to relocate because they cannot tolerate root disturbance. Plant your palm as you would any other tree. Mulch and water thoroughly. It is best to keep turfgrass and trimmers away from your palm.

Staking might be necessary for palms over 6-8' tall. Nails should NEVER be driven into the trunk as this damages the trunk and invites unwanted pests. One method is to use three one-foot sections of 2x4's bound around the trunk using metal or rubber strapping material. Then the braces can be set against and nailed into the 2x4's, NOT the trunk. Stakes should not be left in place over a year.

After about a week, you can begin your fertilization schedule. There are fertilizers specifically for palms but you can also use a balanced tree fertilizer. No high nitrogen fertilizers, please. Fertilize every 4-6 weeks during the growing season with your last application being around the first of August.

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Water your palm when soil is dry to about your second knuckle. Except for the Everglades Palm, most palms don't like wet feet.

Palms should be pruned to remove dead fronds, but take care not to over-prune. As with crepe myrtles, many palms have suffered at the hands of an overzealous pruner. Fronds are critical to the growth and development of the palm. Fronds that are starting to turn yellow should not be removed as they are still contributing to the health of the palm. Remove fronds once they have turned brown.

Our weather over the last several years has brought some interesting challenges to palm growers. Even though palms are often found along the coast, they can suffer from salt buildup in the soil during periods of drought. It is important to water regularly to reduce salt buildup. Similarly, our last couple of winters have taken a toll on palms in our area. When near freezing weather is predicted, it is important that plants are thoroughly watered. A dehydrated plant, especially with a northern exposure does not fare well in a freeze.



***Below, left to right, Mexican fan palm, Pindo palm, Sabal palm***

Some palms should be avoided, as they might require replacement every few years, such as the Alexander, Bottle, Foxtail and the Christmas Tree palm (known as Adonidia or Dwarf Royal palm, *Veitchia merrillii*). Varieties that do well in our area include the Everglades, Australian Fan, Washington Fan, California Fan, Needle, Sabal palms, the Pindo and Jelly palm (the *Butia* genus), and the Phoenix genus palms (includes the true Date palm, Canary Island Date and Wild Date (*Phoenix sylvestris*)).

About the only feather palms that will do well are the Jelly or Pindo palms. If you are lucky enough to find it on-line, one fishtail palm that has done well for me here is the Himalayan fishtail palm (*Caryota maxima* 'Himalaya'). With plenty of water, it is a fast grower with some cold tolerance.

Another notable palm (and a personal favorite of mine) that does well in our area is the Bismarck palm. This native of Madagascar is a rather slow grower here, so consider planting a 15-20 gallon size plant. Unlike many other palms, this

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one does not tolerate root ball disturbance. Remove it from the container and set it into the prepared site. With some care, this majestic palm with its blue-grey fronds will be a wonderful addition to your landscape.

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