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Palm Care in North Texas

Palms can be a beautiful addition to your outdoor spaces! There are few things that bring that touch of the tropics to the back yard like seeing palm fronds moving in the wind. The information below is all about helping you select the right palms for success in our area and maintain them properly.

Selecting a Palm

Palms vary drastically in winter hardiness, size, and form. Listed below are palms we carry for North Texas. Most of them will tolerate our normal winter with only a bit of care, and a few need regular protection from ice or cold. To be clear: **we carry the most cold tolerant palms available. If a palm you are interested in is not listed - it's not winter hardy here!** It's important to emphasize this because a lot of South Texas palms can be found in our market. Many of those palms can grow two to three times faster than our most recommended varieties, so it's easy to get a big palm for a relatively low cost. They're not a good deal, however, as an average winter for our region can stunt or kill these plants without heroic protection from winter ice storms.

We have rated the winter hardiness of the palms we sell below. Palms rated "A" are reasonable to plant outside as they will tolerate our average winter with varying amounts of protection from severe weather. Those with "D" ratings are best grow in containers so they can be moved inside for the winter, otherwise, you should be ready to do a lot of preparation to protect the plant. This includes some palms which have done just fine for a decade here unprotected, but didn't survive the severe winters we have experienced.

Planting a Palm

Palms do not need excessive soil preparation. Just blend our Covington's Soil Builder (compost, expanded shale, and greensand) to the existing soil as you back fill around the root ball, then top the whole planting off with at least a 2" layer of mulch to cover. This is a pretty standard way to plant any common tree or shrub in our area. Don't add soil to cover any exposed roots at the base of a palm--this can injure the plant. If you're planting a palm in a container, be sure the container is good sized - 18" or larger across the top-- the larger the better.

Maintaining a Palm

Palms need moderate amounts of soil moisture to remain healthy. Keep a 2" or deeper layer of mulch around your palm year round to moderate the impact of extreme heat or cold. Palms require large amounts of specific micronutrients to stay nice and green, without showing yellow or blackened tips on the ends of the fronds. Feed palms generously three times a year, in mid-March, May, and September, with our Carl Pool's Palm Food. It is the best balanced palm food we've found for the specific nutritional needs of palms in our area.

Protecting Palms from Cold

Even the most cold-hardy palms prefer to not be covered in ice (snow's much less serious). We sell a material called frost cloth with which you can protect palms from severe ice storms. Tie the palm leaves sharply upright, and wrap upward from the base of the plant over the top of the palm leaves. Take the excess over the top of the palm and fold it over, then secure the wrapping in place with rope or twine. Frost cloth is superior to burlap or sheets for protecting palms from heavy ice, as it doesn't absorb water very well. Burlap or similar materials become soaked with water and then freeze right against your leaves, so they're not desirable for cold protection. Palms do not need covering all winter! Let the leaves breathe and get some light after the severe cold weather event is over. For the coldest ice storms, particularly for more tender palms, Christmas lights - the small bulb varieties, not the big peanut bulbs which can scorch and burn, can be strung around the covered palm and turned

on to provide additional warmth. Older, better established palms tolerate severe cold better than newly planted palms, so watch new plantings more closely.

Palms can lose some or all of their leaves to winter's cold without any serious ill effect. The most important part of your palm to protect is the heart area right where the palm leaves enter the center of the trunk. Direct cold damage is not the most serious threat...a condition called crown rot is the thing you most want to prevent. Crown rot happens when the heart of the palm takes enough cold damage that it's frostbitten and tissue inside the trunk begins to decay. The frost damage itself is not life-threatening, however, as tissue decays, the decay products kill healthy tissue below, which then rots, and the cycle continues. This decay is vastly accelerated once the temperatures warm up in the late springtime so cold damage can literally kill a palm in July. (A palm that has leaves, but simply puts out no new growth in the spring is a warning signal!)

To prevent this decay, after any seriously cold spell where your palm loses leaves or you're worried about the temperature for the variety of palm you've planted, drench the heart of the palm with our ferti-lome Systemic Fungicide after the cold snap is over. This fungicide will prevent interior decay as the plant deals with replacing the frost-killed tissue. It's not always necessary, but it's cheap insurance for a great big palm after an ice storm.

Palm Information by Variety

Windmill Palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei* - "A" hardiness - One of the toughest palms for this area. They reach a height of 10-20' and width of 8-10' in the landscape and are hardy to 10-20° F. It is rarely necessary to cover or wrap this palm during the winter, only necessary for the worst weather events. Most winters, well established plants are fine with no covering at all! This palm is noted for the hairy, fibrous trunk that adds additional winter insulation to the plant. Windmill palms are upright growers that show a nice clear trunk.

Mediterranean Fan Palm, *Chamaerops humilis* - "A" hardiness - A shorter palm, topping out at 10' tall and 6-8' wide, ideal for areas where too great a height is undesirable. They tend to be multi-trunked and are rarely identical! In fact it is not unusual for every single one in a nursery row to look a little different than its neighbor. Suited for both container and in-ground growing and one of the best cold-tolerant palms (hardy to 10-20° F).

Pindo Palm, *Butia capitata* - "A" hardiness - Pindo palm grows 10-20' tall and wide, with beautiful arching leaves that can reach as much as 6-10' long! The leaves curve gracefully downward toward the trunk and have an attractive bluish-green to grey-green color. Pindo palms have good cold tolerance (hardy to 10-20° F), an attractive trunk, and in mild climates they produce an edible fruit that's suitable for making preserves or jelly. This palm holds up excellently in severe heat areas.

Texas Sabal Palm, *Sabal texana* - "A" hardiness - Sabal palms are slow-growers that reach 20-30' tall and 15-20' wide. They have an extremely upright growth pattern, and are the only palm native to Texas! They adapt readily to a variety of soils and conditions, and will tolerate our winters with some protection from hard ices (hardy to 10-20° F). The trunk has a striking pattern of "boots" formed where the lower leaves were once part of the trunk, then cut as the leaves aged.

Dwarf Sabal Palm, *Sabal minor* - "A" hardiness - A very slow growing, durable palm that has bluish-green, fan-shaped leaves. Reaches 4-5' tall and wide and stays low to the ground. The stems arise from a crown of underground roots. Grows well in moist soil, hardy to 10-20° F, and is drought tolerant when established.

Mexican Fan Palm, *Washingtonia robusta* - "D" hardiness - Tall-growing upright palm that will adapt to a variety of soils and is very drought tolerant. It will grow at roughly twice the speed of a Windmill palm! It's a handsome palm, with the stems of the leaves having a decided hooked pattern. This palm has a "D" in cold hardiness because they may be heavily damaged or even died during severe winter weather. It's not our most recommended palm, but it's pretty and grows fast. ****We do not warranty this plant.***

Sago Palm, *Cycas revoluta* - "D-" hardiness - These are not true palms at all, but cycads! It makes a great container plant (so it can be brought inside the garage for truly severe weather), or can be planted in the ground with diligent care taken to cover it for hard cold weather events. Hard, dark green leafy fronds come out of the top of a short-bodied orangish trunk. We strongly recommend this more as a container plant. ****We do not warranty this plant.***