



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

## Palm Talk

Many communities have heavy tree canopies but it is the palms that provide the tropical look for which Central Florida is noted. Palms have different requirements than trees and many problems can be eliminated by understanding how palms grow and the do's and don'ts of palm maintenance.

Palms grow either as single or multiple trunks and a few grow without forming any trunk and their fronds stay close to the ground. The shapes of the fronds of most palms are one of the following three types:

- Pinnate, with the structure of a feather with a center mid rib (pindo or queen palm)
- Palmate, with the shape of an open hand with fingers extending from the palm (saw palmetto or European fan palm).
- Costapalmate, with a palmate look but with a stem extending part way into the frond (sabal palm).

Palms need their fronds to generate energy for proper growth and all healthy green fronds should remain on the palm. Instead of having wasteful and harmful "hurricane cuts" performed on your palm trees, remove only dead or diseased fronds. Imagine a clock face with the hands at 9:00 and 3:00; fronds on a palm tree should be left on within at least those positions. Removing too many fronds can lead to "pencil pointing", a visible narrowing and hence weakening of the trunk. Excessive frond removal may also lower cold tolerance.

Palm trunks will not heal from wounds so never allow someone to climb the trunk using spikes and don't use the trunk as a bulletin board. When bracing a palm do not screw or nail into the trunk. Attach braces to battens over burlap strapped around the trunk. Keep mowers and string trimmers away from trunks by placing palms away from lawn areas within landscape beds or

mulch rings. Deter diseases such as Ganoderma fungus (butt rot) by keeping the trunk free of injury and minimizing the contact of mulch with the base of the trunk. Use palm fertilizer with potassium and magnesium as well as micronutrients (trace minerals) to prevent nutritional deficiencies. **DO NOT** use lawn fertilizer, which is harmful. When lawn areas are within 25-feet of palms, fertilize the lawn with palm instead of lawn fertilizer.

Palm trunks have growing buds just below where the fronds emerge. If the bud in that area is severely damaged mechanically or by cold temperatures the whole palm will die. When selecting for cold hardiness stay away from the South Florida palms. Once the heads are well above ground the fronds and the growing bud are difficult to protect from the cold. Flower stalks provide nectar for bees and other pollinators, however, the resulting fruits can create extra work when the seeds sprout. Remove the stalks after flowering or leave them in place so the fruits can provide food for wildlife.

Proper selection and maintenance will create healthy palms to greet those northern visitors who find our snow-free winter landscapes so inviting.



Above, European fan palm - *Chamaerops humilis* with palmate fronds



Above, Pindo palm - *Butia capitata*, with pinnate fronds.



Left, Trunk in the rear shows pencil pointing on a sabal palm - *Sabal palmetto*.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas, Hortus, Oasis.

Hortus Oasis (FL26000315) in Winter Park is a boutique garden design company specializing in residential, commercial and specialty gardens. Stephen is a registered landscape architect and Kristin is a certified landscape designer. Contact them at 407-622-4886/garden@hortusoasis.com

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