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Cold Hardy Palm Trees For Northern Garden Planting

By Pat Malcolm

Palm trees were once thought to be suitable for planting only in tropical landscapes, however,

several cold hardy palm trees occur naturally, growing in America, where snows fall during winter. The windmill palm tree, *Trachycarpus fortunei*; the Dwarf Palmetto palm tree, *Sabal minor*; the Saw palmetto, *Serenoa repens*; and the Sabal Palm, *sabal palmetto*; and the Needle Palm, *Rhapidophyllun hystrix*; Much of the information that is published in book form, magazine articles and Internet websites is extremely conservative, perhaps because the testing for national cold hardiness is of a recent origin; and also temperature fluctuations caused by global warming increases the survival rate of palm tree plantings in recent years. Try buying a few palm trees in your garden to plant and grow. Very large specimen palm trees can be purchased for semi-truck fast delivery at a few Internet nursery websites.

The Windmill palm tree, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, also is called a Chusan palm and a Chinese Windmill palm tree, was imported from Japan, perhaps first, into the United States, but most botanists believe that this palm tree originated in China, where many seed and specimen trees were purchased to import into the US. Windmill palm trees are a common landscape sight throughout Europe, the United States, and Canada. These Windmill palm trees are very cold hardy, and can be seen flourishing along the city streets of Lake Lucerne, Switzerland, where the palms grow up to 40ft in height. The slender, graceful trunks are covered with brown-black fibers that appear as hair from a distance, and with aging, the fibers turn gray, and on large old trees the fibers fall off to reveal a slick beautiful trunk. The waxy leaves are bright green above and silver-green below; growing 2 feet long and 2 feet wide, smaller than most other palm trees. Windmill palm trees grow a flower stalk 2 feet long, with yellow, pleasantly aromatic flowers developing into ½" long blue fruits.

Windmill palm trees, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, are so cold hardy that semi-truck loads of large specimen sized trees have been nursery distributed for customers in Canada who wish to buy a palm to place in a tropical landscape design. The famous Cloister Hotel at Sea Island, Georgia plants grouping of large Windmill palms, some 20-30 feet for planting near entrances and landscape positions close to buildings. Windmill palms are tolerant of salt water spray and are very adaptable for planting and growing in most areas of the United States.

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The Dwarf Palmetto palm tree, *Sabal minor*, is not a fast growing plant, and grows abundantly in pine tree forests, and in poorly drained lowlands. Innumerable colonies of dwarf palmetto palm grow next to the highway between Albany, Georgia and Blakely, Georgia on swampland, that is under water periodically, and the dwarf palmetto palms grow in very heavy shade. Native to the Southeastern US, this palm grows small trunks that remain hidden behind the leaves. The flower stalk grows four to six feet, and white flowers grow into one-half inch, black fruit. This extremely adaptable palm tree is drought tolerant, and popularly is grown as a native, landscape specimen shrub or in rows as a privacy screen. This dwarf palmetto grows beautiful, pest resistant leaves, and can be seen growing as a salt water resistant plant in large landscape borders of Sea Island, Georgia, where land purchasers value the natural appearance and incorporate the plant into landscape designs.

Saw palmetto, *Serenoa repens*, is one of the native Southeastern plants that has become the rage for planting as a cold hardy palm in Northern States, where it can survive temperatures of -10 F. The beautiful blue or green colored leaves are shiny and waxy, growing about five feet long. The flower stalk grows 3 feet long and appears in the heat of the summer, covered with white flowers that form

blue fruit one inch in diameter. The saw palmetto palm tree is very adaptable for cold hardy growing in Northern states, where temperature extremes damage most other palms. These palm trees are grown mostly as clumping shrubs in naturalistic landscapes. You should buy large Saw palmetto palms, as they do not transplant well and should be planted and grown from a container plant nursery. Very exotic trunks form on century old Saw palmetto palms, that can be seen growing on the sand dunes next to salt water waves spraying the leaves at Sea Island, Georgia. Trunks on these trees had the lower leaves removed to reveal trunks 4ft long that can grow parallel to the ground or at right angles or twisted. All palm tree trunks obviously shaped by storms or hurricanes, that may have blown over the plants rooted in the sand, only to regrow at a different angle. These palm trees must be seen to appreciate a dune of sand landscaped properly.

The Cabbage palm tree (*Sabal palmetto*) is also called the Sabal Palm, and is believed to be the most commonly planted palm tree in the Southern US. This palm tree is native to that area, and grows in forests throughout Florida and coastal Georgia. The Cabbage palm tree can grow to 40 feet, but only grows about one foot per year. Upon aging, the lower leaf stem remains (petioles) attached for many years, giving the trunk a bazaar, forbidding appearance. After many years, the leaf remains can be removed artificially, or naturally, giving the trunk a slick, desirable look in the landscape. During hot weather, white flowers grow fast, to 6 feet long, to produce one-half inch black fruit that fall to the ground. Sabal palm trees grow as far North as coastal Virginia, and Carolina landscapes, and are cold hardy to below zero temperatures. This Cabbage palm is drought resistant, requires little care or growth maintenance when planted in the landscape, and is so salt water tolerant, it can be found growing along the sea coast, sometimes falling into the ocean with sea erosion.

Sabal palm trees are considered as the State tree in Florida and South Carolina. Because Sable palm tree roots do not branch like other palms, transplanting the tree can be difficult unless the leaves are all removed before transplanting into home landscapes, and since they are not fast growing, it is not unusual for the palm tree to require 3 to 4 years to regrow the canopy leaves to normal size. The cabbage palm is also susceptible to hurricane damage, because its roots are not largely branched like other palm trees to anchor the trunk into the earth.

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The Needle Palm, *Rhapidoe phyllum histrix*, is native to the Southeastern United States, and is considered to be one of the most cold hardy palm trees growing in the United States. Buyers find it difficult to purchase this palm tree, because it has been removed from most of the forests, where it is not a fast growing palm tree. Large trunks up to 4 feet tall are rare, and very expensive, costing each thousands of dollars. But, this needle palm has survived minus 10 degrees F at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden in New York for many years, unaffected by the snow and cold temperatures. The leaves are two feet long and 4 feet wide, and the trunk is dangerously armed with white, sharp, 5 inch needles, easily being detached from the trunk, with the overall appearance like that of a porcupine. Even though the needle palm trees hundred of years old are expensive, it is possible to buy smaller plants at reasonable prices for fast shipment at many Internet nursery websites.

Patrick A. Malcolm, owner of TyTy Nursery, has an M.S. degree in Biochemistry and has cultivated palm trees for over three decades.

<http://www.tytyga.com>

Moderate Cold Hardy Traits In Date Palms And Fan Palms

By Pat Malcolm

The Canary Island Date palm, *Phoenix canariensis*, is one of the most sought after and spectacular palm trees seen in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Lower Texas, and coastal South Carolina. This large, formal palm tree, looks great when grown next to Mediterranean architectural structures at resorts and hotels, such as the Cloister Hotel, at Sea Island, Georgia, where the large Canary Island Date palms are planted and grown at the entrances to the hotels, and stretching up the boulevards as a street tree along Sea Island Drive. These Canary Island Date palms produce dates, but barely palatable; are very slow growing, and the unique triangular leaf scars are very ornamental. You can buy Canary Island Date palms in large specimen sizes that are extremely expensive, but small trees are reasonably priced at most nurseries.

Other Phoenix Date Palm trees that show moderate cold hardy traits are the standard Biblical Date palms, *Phoenix dactylifera*; the celebrated plant of the Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, documented thousands of years ago in Deuteronomy 8:8, "A land (Israel) of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees, and pomegranates, a land of olive oil, and dates (palms)." A huge grove of these large date palms grow outside Yuma, Az, where the date products are harvested seasonally from the trees with tall ladders, as they have been for decades past.

The Wild Date palm, *Phoenix sylvestris*, called the Sylvester palm, is not a fast growing date palm tree, but the blue-green foliage forms a large canopy of leaves that persists for years. The wild, large date palm tree, *Phoenix sylvestris*, can grow to 40 feet, but the trunk is slender, and this wild date palm will readily hybridize with other date palms growing nearby. You can buy large specimens of wild, date palm trees that are very expensive, but smaller trees can be purchased at reasonable prices. This palm tree has also been called a Toddy palm, because the sweet dates are harvested and fermented into an alcoholic drink, a Toddy.

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The Chinese Fan Palm, *Livistona chinensis*, is a well adapted tree to large areas of the South. The huge leaves are fan shaped (palmate), and not fast growing, but the large heavy leaves give a weeping appearance. You can buy these Chinese fan trees cheap, but almost any nursery sells them, and they can survive cold hardy temperatures, around 20 F.

Mexican Fan Palm Tree, *Washingtonia robusta*, is also called the Washington Palm Tree, and grows faster than most other cold hardy Palm Trees. The fan shaped, bright green leaves are large, growing 6 feet long. Mature Washington Palm trees can grow 100 feet tall, and small Washington Palm Trees are so fast growing and inexpensive to buy, many people are planting them. Large Washington palm trees planted in front of motels at Waycross, Georgia, have survived extreme cold winters, and even when leaf canopies were frozen and black, the new shoots grew back in the Spring to renew their beauty.

The European Fan Palm, *Chamaerops humilis*, also called the Mediterranean Fan Palm, is a beautiful cluster palm; a favorite palm tree planted abundantly at the Cloister Hotel, at Sea Island, Georgia. The European Palm Tree forms multiple, daughter, closely connected, palm trees that were planted and grown as circular groups, although if the daughter palm trees are removed after the trunks grow to 3 - 4 feet, single trunked specimens can be grown in the landscape. The leaves are very variable in color, from green to silver. This very delicately leaved plant is controlled by a graceful, slender trunk, that is

embedded with long brown fibers. In Mediterranean areas, the European Palm tree is often grown as a street tree, planted in large containers. Its slow growing character makes the European palm tree well adapted for planting in pots.

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