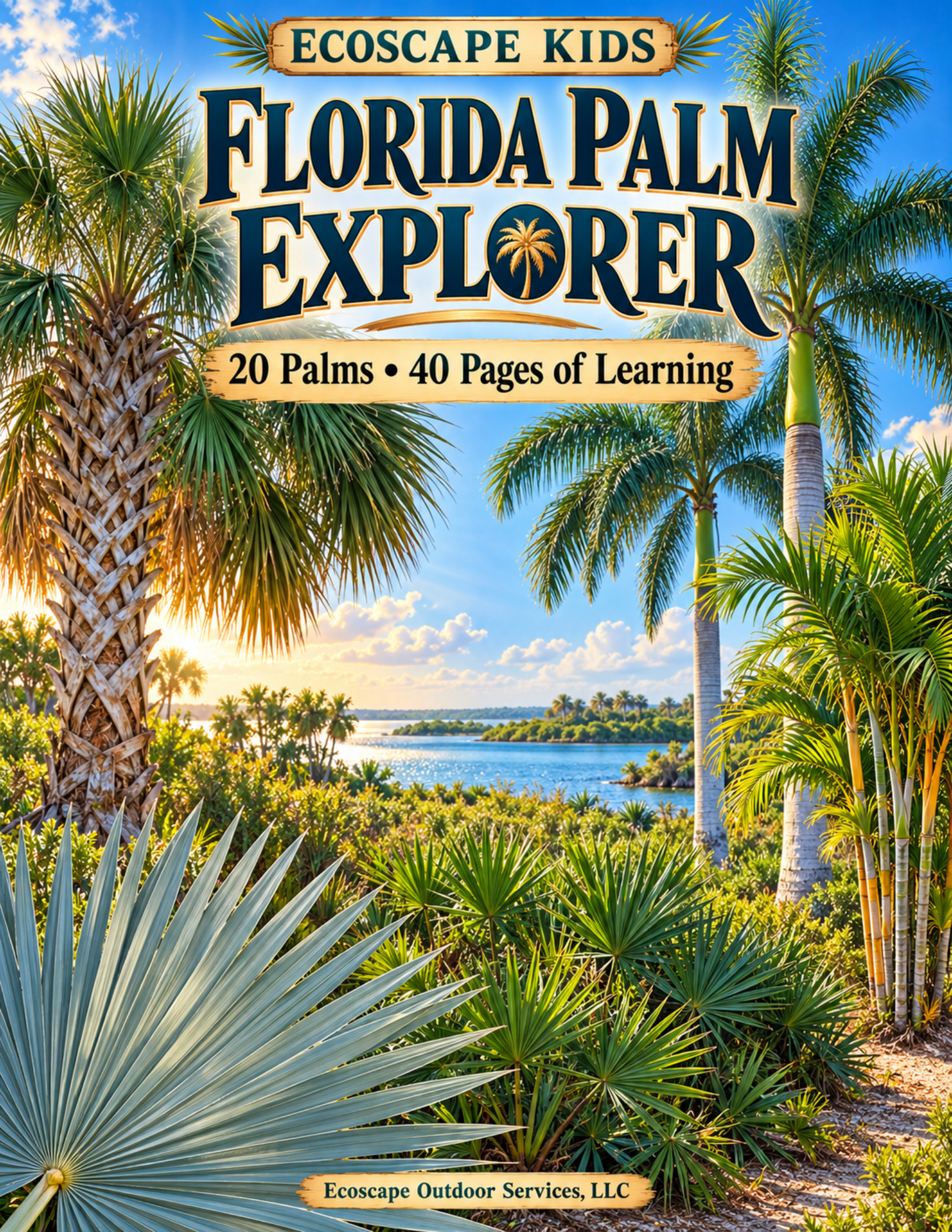
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FLORIDA PALM EXPLORER

20 Palms • 40 Pages of Learning



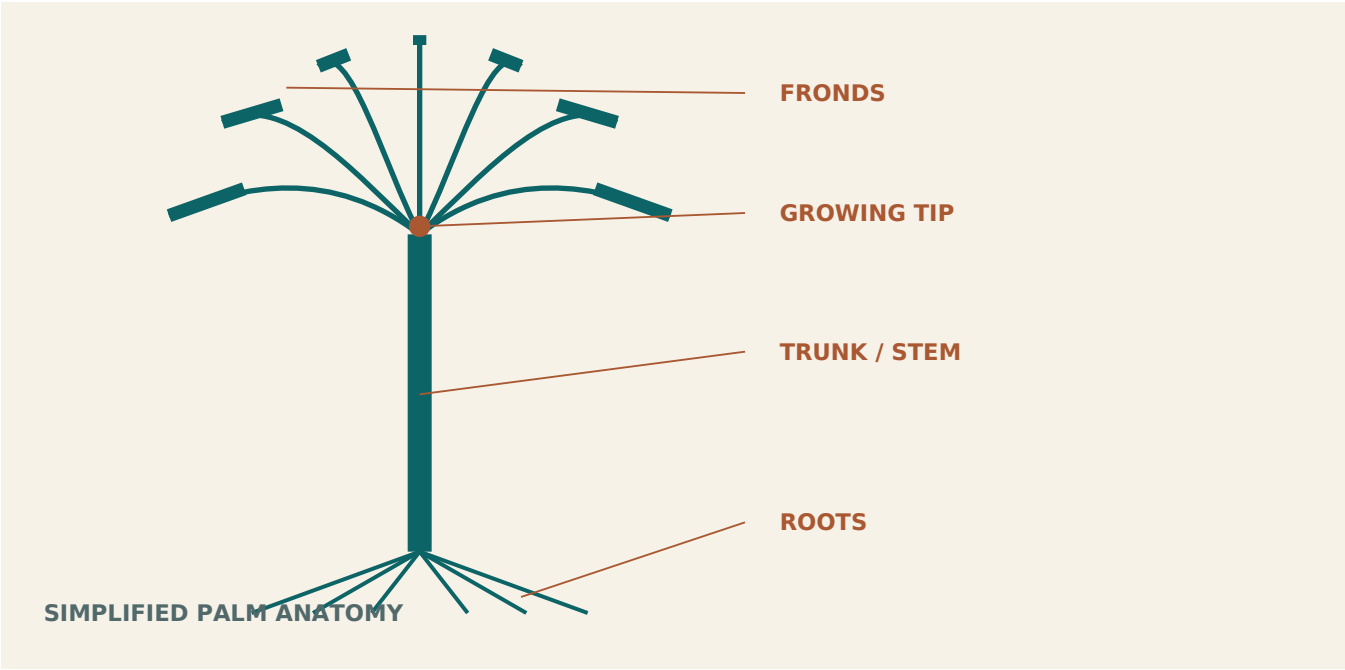
Ecoscape Outdoor Services, LLC

What Makes a Palm?

A different way to grow

PALM SCIENCE

Palms belong to the flowering-plant family Arecaceae. Some grow into tall trees, while others remain low or form many stems. All twenty plants in this guide are true palms.



SIMPLIFIED PALM ANATOMY

GROWTH AT THE TOP

Each stem has a growing tip which produces new leaves. A clustering palm has several stems, each with its own crown.

ROOTS FROM THE BASE

Palms produce many roots from the stem base. They do not rely on one large central taproot. Roots absorb water and dissolved nutrients.

LEAVES ARE WORKING PARTS

Green leaves capture light for photosynthesis, the process plants use to make sugars. A palm’s crown changes as new leaves open and older ones age. The rings on a trunk are leaf scars, not yearly growth rings.

Illustrations are enlarged or reduced for clarity. Typical heights vary with age, site, and growing conditions.

Fronds, Fans & Look-Alikes

Useful clues before meeting the twenty palms

LEAF SHAPES AND ORIGINS

PALMATE



Segments spread from one point near the stalk tip, making a fan-shaped blade.

PINNATE



Separate leaflets line a central axis called the rachis, making a feather-shaped leaf.

COSTAPALMATE



A costa extends into the fan and bends the blade. Sabal palms have this leaf type.

NATIVE, INTRODUCED, AND INVASIVE

Native palms occur naturally in a region. Introduced palms arrived through human movement. An introduced plant is not automatically invasive. Invasive plants spread in ways which harm native communities. This guide identifies palms without recommending every species for planting.

A SAGO “PALM” IS A CYCAD

Cycas revoluta, commonly called sago palm, is not a palm. Cycads and palms sometimes share a feather-leaf outline, but belong to different plant groups. Palms produce flowers and fruits. Cycads produce seeds in cone-like reproductive structures rather than fruits.

Sago cycads are poisonous to people and pets. A palm-like shape does not establish a plant’s identity or whether its parts are safe to eat.

Eight palms in this book are Florida natives. Twelve are introduced landscape palms. Native populations and cultivated specimens are distinguished throughout.

Cabbage Palm

Sabal palmetto

IDENTIFICATION

- **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Florida and the southeastern coastal United States

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Usually about 40–50 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Costapalmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Single trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Hammocks, flatwoods, wetlands, and planted landscapes.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Rounded crown of curved fans
- No sharp teeth along the leaf stalk
- Old leaf bases sometimes form a crisscross pattern

FLORIDA’S STATE TREE

The cabbage palm is Florida’s state tree. Young plants often remain close to the ground for years before a visible trunk develops. A small plant is not always a different species.

Cabbage Palm

Sabal palmetto

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

FLORIDA NATIVE



01 THE FROND

A curved costa extends into the fan. Narrow segments remain joined near the base, and fine fibers often hang between them.

COSTAPALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

Old leaf bases are called boots. Some trunks retain many boots, while others shed them and become smoother. These patterns do not tell an exact age.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Saw palmetto has toothed leaf stalks. Cabbage palm does not. A young cabbage palm stays low, so height alone does not separate these two palms.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Large sprays of pale flowers attract bees. Small fruits ripen black and are eaten by birds and mammals, which help move seeds. An evergreen crown provides living space above the ground. Flowers and fruit link the palm to pollinators and seed-moving animals.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Saw Palmetto

Serenoa repens

IDENTIFICATION

- **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Southeastern United States, including Florida

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Usually about 4–8 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Palmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Creeping, branching stems

FLORIDA SETTING

Pine flatwoods, hammocks, and sandy coastal habitats.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Fans emerge from low, spreading stems
- Leaf-stalk edges have sawlike teeth
- Leaves occur in green and silvery forms

A PALM THAT SPREADS SIDEWAYS

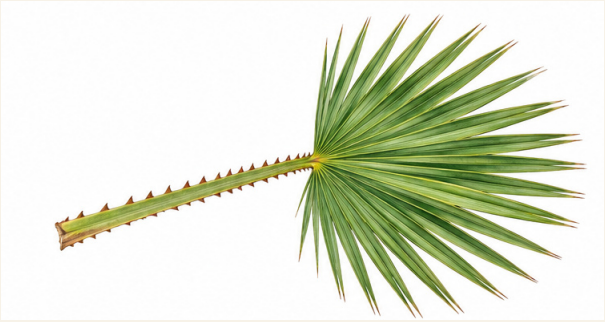
Saw palmetto often grows horizontally and branches. What looks like several separate shrubs sometimes belongs to a connected plant. Its low shape is a natural growth form, not a young tree waiting to become tall.

Saw Palmetto

Serenoa repens

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

FLORIDA NATIVE



01 THE FROND

The blade spreads from the end of the leaf stalk. Sharp teeth along that stalk explain the word “saw” in its common name.

PALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

Stems often creep along or beneath the ground. Protected growth helps plants recover after fire in their native habitats.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Compare its toothed stalk with a cabbage palm’s smooth stalk. Both carry fan-shaped leaves, but their edges and growth habits provide different clues.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Creamy flower clusters attract insects. Dark ripe fruits feed wildlife. Dense palmetto cover also shelters animals near the ground. A flatwoods plant community includes low palms as well as tall pines. Different heights create different places to feed and hide.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Dwarf Palmetto

Sabal minor

IDENTIFICATION

- **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Southeastern United States into northeastern Mexico

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Usually about 3–6 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Weakly costapalmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Usually an underground trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Moist woods, floodplain margins, and shaded understory.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Broad, dark green fans close to the ground
- Leaf stalks lack sawlike teeth
- Upright flower stalks rise above the leaves

SMALL DOES NOT MEAN YOUNG

Dwarf palmetto often flowers while its trunk remains underground. A mature adult therefore resembles a small cluster of leaves. Tall flower stalks help distinguish it from a young cabbage palm.

Dwarf Palmetto

Sabal minor

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● **FLORIDA NATIVE**



01 THE FROND

The fan has only a short costa, so it looks flatter than the strongly folded leaves of some other Sabal palms.

WEAKLY COSTAPALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

Most of the stem stays hidden. Some individuals develop a short aboveground trunk, so a single feature is not enough for identification.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

A short flowering palm is not necessarily a seedling. Compare this adult’s upright flower stalk with the usually shorter flower clusters of scrub palmetto.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Small pale flowers are followed by dark fruits. Pollinating insects visit the flowers, while birds and small mammals consume the fruit. This palm occupies the understory, the lower plant layer beneath larger trees. Its habitat differs from the dry scrub of scrub palmetto.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Scrub Palmetto

Sabal etonia

IDENTIFICATION

● **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Florida only

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Usually about 3–6 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Strongly costapalmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Mostly an underground stem

FLORIDA SETTING

Dry sandy scrub on Florida’s ridges.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Yellow-green fans with a strong bend
- Fibers between leaf segments
- Flower clusters usually remain within the leaves

A FLORIDA SPECIALIST

Scrub palmetto is endemic to Florida. Endemic means its natural range is limited to one region. Its home is dry scrub, a habitat with sandy soils and distinctive plants.

Scrub Palmetto

Sabal etonia

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● FLORIDA NATIVE



01 THE FROND

A long costa bends the leaf into a pronounced three-dimensional fan. Fine fibers appear between the narrow segments.

STRONGLY COSTAPALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

The stem usually remains underground. A short aboveground section sometimes develops, but a tall exposed trunk is not typical.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Compare its strongly bent fan and dry habitat with dwarf palmetto’s flatter fan and wetter woodland habitat. Closely related species still occupy different environments.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Branched flower clusters are usually shorter than the leaves. Rounded fruits darken as they ripen. Flower-stalk position is an important identification clue. The low palm shares scrub with shrubs and pines. Protecting its habitat protects the whole plant community, not only one species.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Paurotis Palm

Acoelorrhaphe wrightii

IDENTIFICATION

- **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

South Florida, the Caribbean, and Central America

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 20–30 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Fan

GROWTH FORM

Naturally clustering stems

FLORIDA SETTING

Wetland edges and moist sites in southern Florida.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Many slender trunks form one large clump
- Green fans sit on spiny stalks
- Trunks retain fibers and old leaf bases

ONE CLUMP, MANY GROWING TIPS

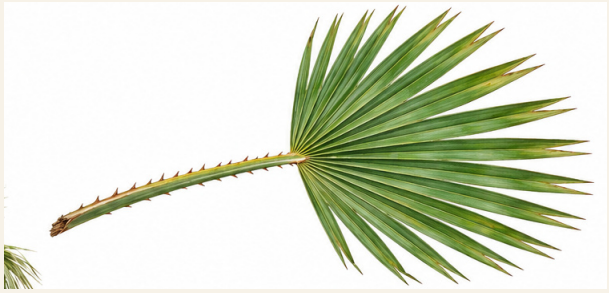
A paurotis clump produces multiple stems. Each stem has its own crown and growing tip. This natural clustering differs from several single-trunk palms planted close together.

Paurotis Palm

Acoelorrhaphe wrightii

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● FLORIDA NATIVE



01 THE FROND

The fans have narrow segments with split tips. The leaf stalk has stout teeth along its edges.

FAN



02 THE TRUNK

Slender upright stems rise together. Fibers and old leaf bases give the stems a rougher surface than a royal palm’s smooth trunk.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Areca also grows in clumps, but its leaves are feather-shaped. Paurotis has fans. A shared growth habit does not mean two plants are the same species.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Sprays of creamy flowers project beyond the leaves. Small fruits pass through orange before becoming black when ripe. Its wetland origins explain why this palm often grows in moist places. Native habitat and appearance together help explain a species.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Royal Palm

Roystonea regia

IDENTIFICATION

● **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

South Florida and Cuba

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 50–70 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single trunk with crownshaft

FLORIDA SETTING

Warm South Florida habitats and planted avenues.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Tall, smooth, pale gray trunk
- Long smooth green crownshaft
- Large feather leaves arch above the crownshaft

THE GREEN COLUMN IS MADE OF LEAVES

The crownshaft looks like a green stem, but overlapping leaf bases form it. A royal palm’s gray trunk ends below this smooth green section.

Royal Palm

Roystonea regia

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

FLORIDA NATIVE



01 THE FROND

Long feather leaves carry many narrow leaflets. New leaves emerge above the crownshaft before spreading outward.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

The trunk is smooth and pale gray. Old leaves naturally detach with their bases, exposing the smooth surface below.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Foxtail palm also has a crownshaft. Its bushier leaves and smaller overall proportions provide extra clues. A crownshaft identifies a structure, not one species.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Large sprays of small cream flowers produce dark fruits eaten by birds. Birds help carry seeds away from the parent palm. Royal leaves are very large and heavy when they fall. The tall crown is a living structure with a changing supply of leaves.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Florida Thatch Palm

Thrinax radiata

IDENTIFICATION

- **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

South Florida and the Caribbean region

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 15–30 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Palmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Single slender trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Coastal hammocks and limestone habitats in southern Florida.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Green, rounded fan leaves
- Slender trunk without a green crownshaft
- Small ripe fruits turn white

WHITE FRUIT IS A USEFUL CLUE

Many familiar palms have dark or orange ripe fruits. Florida thatch palm produces white fruit. Leaf shape, trunk form, and fruit color together provide stronger evidence than any one clue.

Florida Thatch Palm

Thrinax radiata

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

FLORIDA NATIVE



01 THE FROND

The blade spreads into a rounded fan. The leaf stalk is smooth rather than lined with large teeth.

PALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

A slender trunk supports an open crown. This species lacks the smooth green crownshaft seen on royal palms.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Florida silver palm has bright silver leaf undersides. This palm is greener beneath. Both have slender trunks, so frond surfaces and fruit color help separate them.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

White flowers attract insects and develop into small white fruits. Birds use the palm for food and nesting. Florida thatch palm is a native coastal habitat species. Native populations and nursery-grown landscape specimens are different parts of its story.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Florida Silver Palm

Coccothrinax argentata

IDENTIFICATION

- **FLORIDA NATIVE**



NATURAL ORIGIN

South Florida and nearby Caribbean regions

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 6–20 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Palmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Single slender trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Pine rocklands and coastal rockland hammocks.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Green leaf tops and bright silvery undersides
- Deeply divided fans
- Slender trunk often wrapped in woven fibers

TWO COLORS ON ONE LEAF

The common name comes from the silvery lower leaf surface. A breeze turns the leaves and reveals the contrast. Color depends on which surface faces the viewer.

Florida Silver Palm

Coccothrinax argentata

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

FLORIDA NATIVE



01 THE FROND

Many narrow segments make up each fan. Their silver undersides contrast with green upper surfaces, a useful identification feature.

PALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

Leaf bases leave a woven covering of fibers around the slender trunk. This textured wrapping differs from a crownshaft.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Bismarck palm is often silver, too, but its leaves, crown, and trunk are much larger. The native silver palm has a finer, more open appearance.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Small pale flowers grow on branching stalks. Round fruits darken toward purple or black as they mature. This small native palm belongs to warm coastal and rockland habitats. A slow-growing plant still contributes flowers, fruit, and structure to its surroundings.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Christmas Palm

Adonidia merrillii

IDENTIFICATION

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



NATURAL ORIGIN

The Philippines

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Eventually about 20–25 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single trunk, often planted in groups

FLORIDA SETTING

Warm South Florida gardens and sheltered landscapes.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Slender ringed trunk
- Green crownshaft below arching feather leaves
- Bright red ripe fruit clusters

A GROUP IS NOT ALWAYS ONE PLANT

Christmas palms naturally have one stem. A double or triple landscape specimen usually consists of separate palms planted together. Each plant keeps its own roots and growing tip.

Christmas Palm

Adonidia merrillii

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

The arching feather leaves carry leaflets in a V along the central axis. The compact crown looks much smaller than a royal palm’s.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

Old leaves drop cleanly. Their tightly wrapped bases form a smooth green crownshaft above the slender trunk.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Natural areca clumps send up new canes from their base. Grouped Christmas palms usually remain separate single-stemmed individuals. Similar silhouettes sometimes have different explanations.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Fruit clusters develop beneath the crownshaft. They ripen bright red in late fall or winter, explaining the seasonal common name. This introduced palm grows best in warm places. “Found in Florida” and “native to Florida” describe different things.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Areca Palm

Chrysalidocarpus lutescens

IDENTIFICATION

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Madagascar

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 20–35 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Naturally clustering canes

FLORIDA SETTING

Warm gardens, hedges, and planted screens.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Many slender yellow-green canes
- Arching feather leaves
- Ringlike scars on the stems

A PALM WITH TWO SCIENTIFIC NAMES IN BOOKS

Older references often call this palm Dypsis lutescens. Current references also use Chrysalidocarpus lutescens. Scientific names change when research revises relationships among plants.

Areca Palm

Chrysalidocarpus lutescens

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

The long leaves arch upward and outward. Narrow leaflets spread along a central rachis, creating the feathery outline.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

New canes arise from the base and expand the clump. Pale rings mark where older leaves were attached.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Compare the canes with a group of Christmas palms. Areca naturally produces a cluster of stems. Christmas palms are often several individual plants grouped together.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Branched clusters of pale flowers develop near the upper stems. Small fruits mature from yellowish colors toward dark purple or black. A dense clump creates a different plant structure from a single tall trunk. An introduced landscape plant is not a Florida native simply because it is familiar.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Pygmy Date Palm

Phoenix roebelenii

IDENTIFICATION

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Southeast Asia

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Usually up to about 12 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Usually single trunk in landscapes

FLORIDA SETTING

Warm gardens and sheltered planted sites.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Small crown of fine feather leaves
- Slender trunk with peglike old leaf bases
- Sharp spines near each leaf’s base

FINE LEAVES, SHARP BASES

The soft-looking leaflets do not reveal the whole story. Basal leaflets are modified into stiff spines. Different parts of one leaf perform different roles and have different textures.

Pygmy Date Palm

Phoenix roebelenii

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Narrow leaflets line a central axis. Near the base, some leaflets become sharp spines instead of broad green blades.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

The slender trunk is often curved and covered in old leaf bases. Several planted individuals sometimes resemble a naturally clustering palm.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Compare it with Canary Island date palm. Both have feather leaves and basal spines, but the pygmy date palm has a much finer trunk and crown.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Male and female flowers occur on separate plants. Female plants produce small fruits which darken to black when ripe. This small date-palm relative is different from the large palm grown for commercial dates. Common names alone do not describe a plant precisely.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Canary Island Date Palm

Phoenix canariensis

IDENTIFICATION

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



NATURAL ORIGIN

The Canary Islands

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 40–50 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single stout trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Sunny planted landscapes with enough space for a broad crown.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Very thick trunk
- Large round crown of stiff feather leaves
- Diamond-shaped leaf scars on older trunks

A LARGE CROWN TAKES MANY LEAVES

A healthy crown contains many long leaves arranged around one growing tip. Its broad outline is a useful contrast with the much smaller pygmy date palm.

Canary Island Date Palm

Phoenix canariensis

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Long, stiff feather leaves hold many narrow leaflets. The lower leaflets become strong spines near the trunk.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

Old leaf bases eventually fall away, leaving diamond patterns. The stout trunk is much wider than a queen palm’s.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Pygmy date palm is a smaller relative. The date palm grown for food is another species. The name “date palm” applies to several distinct Phoenix palms.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Male and female flowers occur on separate plants. Female plants produce orange fruit, different from the familiar dried dates sold for food. Related Phoenix species sometimes hybridize. A hybrid has parents from different species, which helps explain palms with mixed-looking features.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Date Palm

Phoenix dactylifera

IDENTIFICATION

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Long cultivated in North Africa and the Middle East

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Sometimes about 80 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single trunk, often with basal offshoots

FLORIDA SETTING

Florida landscapes; commercial dates favor much drier climates.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Gray-green feather leaves
- Rough trunk marked by old leaf bases
- Offshoots sometimes grow near the base

FLORIDA IS NOT A DESERT DATE FARM

The date palm grows in Florida, but humid weather makes high-quality fruit production difficult. The same species performs differently in different climates.

Date Palm

Phoenix dactylifera

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Stiff gray-green leaves have narrow leaflets and sharp modified leaflets near the base. This is a feather-leaved palm.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

Offshoots sometimes emerge near the main trunk. Growers use offshoots to reproduce selected varieties without changing their inherited traits.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Canary Island date palm has a much stouter trunk and darker crown. Date palm often has gray-green leaves and basal offshoots. Hybrids sometimes blur these differences.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Male and female flowers grow on separate palms. Pollinated female flowers develop into dates, each with a hard seed inside. Fruit production depends on more than having a tree: pollination, temperature, moisture, and the growing season all influence the outcome.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Queen Palm

Syagrus romanzoffiana

IDENTIFICATION

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



NATURAL ORIGIN

South America

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Up to about 50 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single trunk without crownshaft

FLORIDA SETTING

Planted streets, parks, and warm gardens.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Smooth gray trunk
- Arching, somewhat fluffy feather leaves
- Large clusters of orange fruit

SEEDS SOMETIMES MOVE BEYOND GARDENS

Fruit contains seeds, and some germinate outside planted sites. UF/IFAS identifies queen palm as a plant requiring caution to prevent escape into natural areas.

Queen Palm

Syagrus romanzoffiana

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



01 THE FROND

Leaflets sit in groups and at different angles along the central axis. This gives the leaf a fuller texture than a flat feather.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

The gray trunk lacks a smooth green crownshaft. Old dead leaves often remain attached until removed or broken away.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Royal palm has a conspicuous green crownshaft. Queen palm lacks that smooth green column. Both have feather leaves, but their leaf bases form different structures.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Cream-colored flowers are followed by orange fruits. A large cluster holds many seeds, so fruit production also creates many opportunities for seedlings. Native status, appearance, and behavior are separate questions. An attractive landscape palm still deserves attention to how its seeds spread.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Pindo Palm

Butia odorata

IDENTIFICATION

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



NATURAL ORIGIN

Southern South America

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 15–20 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single stout trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Planted landscapes, including cooler parts of Florida.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Blue-gray to gray-green arching leaves
- Strong downward curve to the fronds
- Rough trunk with persistent leaf bases

A FEATHER LEAF WITH A STRONG CURVE

Pindo leaves arch backward in a distinctive curve. Their gray-green color and shape help separate them from other feather palms. The species also tolerates more cold than many tropical palms.

Pindo Palm

Butia odorata

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Leaflets attach in a deep V along the leaf axis. The stalk has spines, while the long blade curves toward the ground.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

Old leaf bases often persist, creating a knobby surface on the thick trunk. This is leaf-base texture rather than ordinary peeling bark.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Compare its recurved gray-green leaves with the flatter, more upright silver fans of Bismarck palm. Similar colors occur in palms with very different leaf structures.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Flower stalks produce rounded yellow to orange fruit. The common name “jelly palm” refers to food traditionally made from the fruit. Older Florida references often use Butia capitata. For this commonly planted palm, the name Butia odorata is used in current UF/IFAS profiles.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Mexican Fan Palm

Washingtonia robusta

IDENTIFICATION

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



NATURAL ORIGIN

Northern Mexico

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Mature palms sometimes reach 70–100 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Fan

GROWTH FORM

Single tall, tapering trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Planted landscapes and streets in warmer regions.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Very tall, slender upper trunk
- Fan leaves with toothed stalks
- Younger trees often retain a skirt of dead leaves

A SMALL CROWN HIGH ABOVE THE GROUND

An old Mexican fan palm looks like a narrow column topped by a compact crown. The great height develops over time, so young landscape palms look very different.

Mexican Fan Palm

Washingtonia robusta

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Large fan blades divide into many segments. Sharp teeth line the leaf stalk, and threadlike fibers appear on the blade.

FAN



02 THE TRUNK

Old leaves often form a hanging skirt on younger trunks. Taller older palms commonly shed these remains and expose a smoother trunk.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Compare a young skirted trunk with an older exposed trunk. Both belong to the same species. The persistence of dead leaves changes the visible silhouette.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Long branching flower stalks extend beyond the crown. Small fruits ripen black and contain seeds. This palm crosses with California fan palm, producing hybrids. UF/IFAS also flags seed escape concerns in southern Florida, so planted and wild-growing palms are different cases.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Chinese Fan Palm

Livistona chinensis

IDENTIFICATION

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



NATURAL ORIGIN

East Asia

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 30 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Costapalmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Single trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Planted gardens and parks in warmer Florida.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Large fans with drooping segment tips
- Broad crown over one trunk
- Blue-green to dark ripe fruits

WHY IT IS CALLED A FOUNTAIN PALM

The leaf segments hang downward at their tips. This makes the outside of the crown look very different from the stiff upright fans of a Bismarck palm.

Chinese Fan Palm

Livistona chinensis

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

A costa extends into each fan. The long segment tips droop, while the upper blade remains broadly fan-shaped.

COSTAPALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

Young palms form a visible trunk slowly. Closely grouped youngsters eventually need much more room as their crowns expand.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Bismarck palm holds large stiff fans. Chinese fan palm has drooping tips. The direction and stiffness of segments matter as much as the general fan outline.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Branched flower stalks grow among the leaves. Oval blue-green fruits appear in clusters and darken with maturity. This introduced palm sometimes escapes cultivation. Its familiar appearance in gardens does not make it native to Florida.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Bismarck Palm

Bismarckia nobilis

IDENTIFICATION

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Madagascar

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 30–60 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Costapalmate fan

GROWTH FORM

Single stout trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Sunny planted landscapes with room for a broad crown.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Huge stiff fans, usually silver-blue
- Massive rounded crown
- Stout trunk with persistent split leaf bases

SILVER IS A LEAF COLOR, NOT A PALM FAMILY

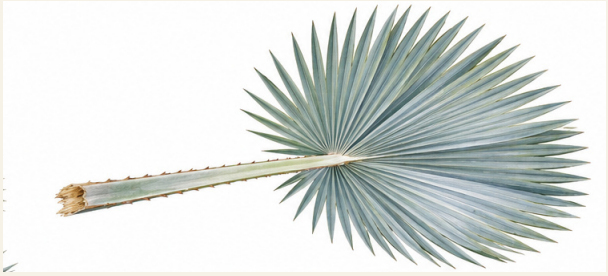
Silver Bismarck palms and Florida silver palms are different species from different places. Similar colors do not mean close identity. Green-leaved Bismarck forms also exist.

Bismarck Palm

Bismarckia nobilis

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Large waxy fans have a strong costa. Their broad surface and stiff segments make the whole crown appear bold and solid.

COSTAPALMATE FAN



02 THE TRUNK

The stout trunk retains split leaf bases before becoming more exposed. It supports a very wide crown, not a narrow tuft.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Florida silver palm is also silver beneath, but it is much smaller and native here. Color alone does not identify a species or its geographic origin.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Male and female flowers occur on separate plants. Female palms produce rounded olive-brown fruits containing seeds. This introduced palm comes from Madagascar. Leaf shape, fruit, origin, and trunk form together distinguish it from Florida’s much smaller native silver palm.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Coconut Palm

Cocos nucifera

IDENTIFICATION

● **INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA**



NATURAL ORIGIN

Tropical Indo-Pacific origin; spread widely by people

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Tall forms often about 50–80 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single often-curving trunk

FLORIDA SETTING

Frost-free South Florida and tropical coastal landscapes.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Long arching feather leaves
- Large coconuts beneath the crown
- Ringed trunk, often curved

A FRUIT BUILT WITH SEVERAL LAYERS

A coconut is a fruit. A fibrous husk surrounds a hard inner shell, and the seed develops inside. The familiar brown coconut sold in shops has usually lost much of its outer husk.

Coconut Palm

Cocos nucifera

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Long feather leaves carry many narrow leaflets. The leaf is much larger than a single narrow leaflet removed from it.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

The trunk often curves and shows old leaf scars. Those rings record former leaf attachments, not one ring for each year.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Royal and coconut palms both have feather leaves. Royal palm has a green crownshaft and small fruit. Coconut palm has no crownshaft and very large fruit.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Flower clusters develop among the leaves. Large fruits mature from green or yellow tones toward brown and contain a fibrous husk. Coconuts float, and people have transported them for centuries. Movement by water and people helps explain the palm’s wide tropical distribution.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Foxtail Palm

Wodyetia bifurcata

IDENTIFICATION

INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



NATURAL ORIGIN

Northeastern Australia

TYPICAL HEIGHT

Often about 30–40 feet

LEAF SHAPE

Feather

GROWTH FORM

Single trunk with crownshaft

FLORIDA SETTING

Warm planted landscapes in southern Florida.

THREE IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Bushy feather leaves
- Pale gray ringed trunk
- Smooth green crownshaft and orange-red fruits

LEAFLETS POINT IN MANY DIRECTIONS

The full-looking leaves give this palm its common name. Leaflets spread around the central axis instead of lying in one flat plane, producing the foxtail appearance.

Foxtail Palm

Wodyetia bifurcata

ANATOMY & CONNECTIONS

● INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA



01 THE FROND

Many leaflets are arranged around the rachis. Split leaflet tips add to the bushy outline of each feather leaf.

FEATHER



02 THE TRUNK

The pale ringed trunk widens somewhat through its middle. A smooth pale-green crownshaft sits below the leaf crown.

A USEFUL COMPARISON

Royal palm is a Florida native with a taller, more massive trunk. Foxtail palm comes from Australia. Both have crownshafts, but their leaves and proportions differ.



03 FLOWERS, FRUIT & WILDLIFE

Branched sprays of white flowers emerge below the crownshaft. Egg-shaped fruits become orange to red as they ripen. The species originated in a limited Australian region but is now planted widely. Its natural range and its cultivated range are different geographic ideas.

Illustrations emphasize identification features. Parts show different scales and stages.

Palm Words to Know

A short botanical glossary

REFERENCE

BOOTS

Old leaf bases remaining on a palm’s trunk.

CLONE

A plant or group produced without mixing genetic material from two parents.

COSTA

An extension of the leaf stalk into the blade of a costapalmate leaf.

COSTAPALMATE

A fan leaf with a costa which extends into and bends the blade.

CROWN

The group of living leaves at the top of a stem.

CROWNSHAFT

A smooth column formed by tightly overlapping, tubular leaf bases.

CYCAD

A seed plant from a group separate from palms. Cycads do not produce flowers or fruits.

ENDEMIC

Naturally limited to a particular geographic region.

FROND

A palm leaf, including its blade and stalk.

FRUIT

A structure which develops from a flower’s ovary and contains seeds.

GERMINATION

The beginning of a seed’s growth into a new plant.

GROWING TIP

The region where a stem produces new leaves and growth.

HABITAT

The environment in which a plant or animal lives.

HYBRID

Offspring whose parents belong to different species or distinct groups.

INTRODUCED

Brought to a region through human activity.

INVASIVE

Introduced and spreading in a way which causes ecological or other harm.

LEAF SCAR

A mark left where a leaf was attached to the stem.

NATIVE

Occurring naturally in a particular region.

PALMATE

Fan-shaped, with segments spreading from near one point.

PETIOLE

The stalk connecting a leaf blade to the stem.

PINNATE

Feather-shaped, with leaflets along a central axis.

RACHIS

The central axis bearing leaflets in a feather-shaped leaf.

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