

# PALMS

## PERFECT FOR THE POOLSIDE

No other family of plants can create the 'feel' of the tropics like palms. If you can visualise your swimming pool as a tropical lagoon then palms can 'transport' you to a romantic and exotic destination at a cost far less than an air ticket.

Palms work very well in poolside landscapes. Most are clean plants that either shed leaves infrequently or hang on to them tightly so that it's necessary to cut them off. The root systems of even large palms are fibrous and thin and generally trouble free beside the pool, as long as there are no leaks in the pool's lining.

Once palms mature you may run into some trouble with falling fruits. One solution is to cut off the flower spikes as they emerge with a long handled pruner.

Not only do palms look great when cluster planted, but they seem to grow better in amongst company. They also combine well with other dramatic foliage plants such as cordyline, dracaena, beaucarnea, philodendron and monstera.

However you can't beat an intensively planted 'all palm' grove for dramatic, tropical effect. By planting sun tough varieties to form a canopy, you can grow shade loving types under their protective cover.

### **PALM GROWING SECRETS OF SUCCESS.**

As a general rule, palms require a free draining soil that is very rich in organic matter so that it can retain moisture. Aim to plant palms in a mix consisting of two parts of organic matter to one part original soil.

They are gross feeders and can be regularly fed with Waldecks Premium All Purpose Plant Food which is rich in nitrogen as well as the trace element iron.

For the first two years of a palm's life it does not want to completely dry out. Heavy mulching with such organic matter as compost, Waldecks Mulching Compost, Waldecks Pure Peat or Waldecks Sheep manure, will help the plant by keeping moisture around the root system.

A new problem has emerged particularly in near coastal gardens where palms have been fed continuously with poultry manure. The disorder, known as "frizzy top" is well named. New fronds emerge yellow or brown in colour and immediately look as if they had been scorched. The basic problem is that the soil has become so alkaline or limey that a number of trace elements have become chemically locked up and unavailable to the plant.

To correct this problem use Waldecks Pure Peat as a thick (8 to 12 cm deep) mulch. Secondly dust sulphur powder around the base every 4 to 6 weeks and apply a dressing of Manganese Sulphate on the soil at least 3 times per year.

### **Tall Palms for full sunny locations by the swimming pool.**

Alexander palm (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*) is happy in shade and will need to be weaned into full sun. This tall slender feather frond palm is frost sensitive and grows to 4 or 5 metres tall. Its cousin the Bangalow palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*) has a similar growth habit.

The central heart of the Australian Cabbage palm can be eaten as a vegetable, hence the common name. This is a hardy, rich green plant with slender, spiny fan like fronds. It's quick growing and can get to 8 or 10 metres high.

Cocos palm (*Arecastrum romanzoffianum*) is a slender fast growing specimen with feather like fronds without spikes. It makes an elegant poolside companion. Cocos can grow to 10 metres high and handle light frost.

Cotton palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) is an incredibly tough plant that can tolerate frost and drought as well as very high temperatures. The fronds are fan shaped and have wispy cotton like strands that trail off the leaf surface. The spines that run along the leaf stalks can be a problem if they are planted close to pathways. This robust palm can grow to 10 or 12 metres high.

Another large specimen is the Canary Island date palm (*Phoenix canariensis*). With a mature height of 8 to 10 metres and a spread of 4 to 5 metres this palm may not be suited to smaller yards. It will handle quite heavy frost as well as drought and extremely high temperatures. Watch for needle like spines at the base of the fronds.

A favourite on the smaller scale is the Chinese fan palm (*Livistona chinensis*). While young it needs shade but as it matures this delicate looking palm can be moved into a full sun location. It can tolerate light frosts. The fan of the leaf is twisted into a fold and gives an elegant, weeping appearance. A mature plant can grow to 3 or 4 metres high.

Blue grey arching feather fronds are the first thing you see with the Jelly palm (*Butea capitata*).

This small landscape feature plant is not only well suited to our climate, it also produces an edible orange fruit about the size of a small mandarin with a chewy, meaty texture and an appealing acid-sweet flavour.

When you first look at the leaves of the Fishtail palm (*Caryota urens*) you would think that the whole kindergarten had been at work tearing each leaflet. This bizarre effect makes this palm a fascinating feature plant in any collection of palms. Fishtail palm thrives in full sun and can grow 6 to 10 metres high. *Caryota* is surprisingly cold tolerant and I've seen a magnificent specimen growing strong in cool Busselton.

If there was a gold medal for palms for harsh Mediterranean climates then the European fan palm (*Chamerops humilis*), which of course comes from there, would win hands down. Often overlooked because of its slow growth, this cluster forming beauty is near indestructible. It can handle coastal conditions, prolonged drought, frost and all the worst easterlies you can find around the foothills areas. The fan shaped fronds have short spiny stems so it looks very compact as a mature plant.

A really unusual new addition to the range of sun loving varieties is the Triangle palm (*Neodypsis decaryi*). Leaf stalks have a crease at the base and each leaf grows immediately above another. A clear triangular pattern is revealed as the plant matures. Foliage is a unique blue green colour that contrasts with most other palms. Growth is not spectacularly fast to around 4 metres high.

Majestic palm (*Ravenea rivularis*) is a self cleaning beauty from Madagascar that matures to look like a stocky version of cocos or Queen palm. This tough palm will grow in a full sun or lightly shaded garden. Feather like fronds are a deep green colour. Recent plantings around Perth have established the Majestic as successful and beautiful as well. Height to 4 metres.

Cape York Peninsular near Cape Tribulation is home to the exotic Foxtail palm. This is an outstanding palm with fluffy, feather frond that have a torn off appearance like the fishtail palm. Around Perth it tends to grow slowly to reach 5 metres in height. Choose a wind protected warm spot, preferably open to the north, so it can soak up any winter sunshine. While it may struggle through the first few winters this is a majestic and rare plant.

This list is certainly not exhaustive as there are new varieties arriving all the time. All of these listed varieties should be readily obtained from your local Waldecks Garden centre.

Happy gardening

