

## Brief Comments on Palms Suited to Indoor Culture<sup>1</sup>

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The subject has never been treated as fully as it deserves, though of course something has appeared in print from time to time. David Barry's article, "Palms for home and greenhouse," adapted for *Principes* from the special issue of the *American Horticultural Magazine* entitled "Cultivated Palms" (1961), was excellent as far as it went. Two lists of palms suitable for house cultivation accompanied the article (*Principes* 5: 17-20).

My contention is that those lists could and should be greatly expanded. In my own experience, nearly all palms not demanding a sunny or arid atmosphere, or else not too rampant growers, can be successfully grown indoors at least for a year or two, and some of them for many years. Obviously the rattans, coconuts, washingtonias and other desert dwellers (braheas, etc.) would not be good subjects indoors, but the truth seems to be that hundreds of palms, instead of only a handful (note Fig. 1), can be handsome plants in the house if properly watered and kept free of mealybug, red spider, and other pests, to all of which they are more subject than if grown outdoors.

My conclusions about the large number of palms quite suitable for house decoration are based on the experiences of having kept as many as 40 or more species indoors for months on end during the colder months here in Daytona Beach

without any material damage of any kind. In fact, I would be at a loss to name many palms unsuitable for home use during one or more seasons. Manifestly the size of the plant and of the room would most often be the determining factor.

In a none too well-lighted foyer of a motel in South Miami (Florida), there were three *Coccothrinax* palms perhaps to 3 feet tall overall in a long planter in the center of said foyer. I just knew that these plants would soon turn sickly and become eyesores soon, but to my astonishment there they remained for all of four years with scarcely a blemish. This was the Riviera Motel on U.S. 1 opposite the University of Miami campus. So, say I, add *Coccothrinax* to the list of house palms; but I'd be the last person to suggest hiding it from the natural light. I'd also suggest adding two or three hundred other palms, with emphasis on the slower growing kinds and the medium, smaller, and dwarfish kinds.

I can confirm something our late friend Dave Barry said on p. 17 of his article, viz., "one of the most delightful palms for interior use is *Livistona rotundifolia*." I took one of these in a 12-inch pot up to Staunton, Va., as a gift to my aunt who lives there. She kept this little gem in her livingroom for four years and it never failed to excite admiration until one day she fell and fractured an ankle, which kept her out of running for about six weeks, during which time the plant never saw one drop of water and went into a fatal decline. How much longer it might have lived if taken care of, I can't even guess at, but probably for another 4 years before beginning to fail. I cite this plant, because it is ultimately of huge proportions, and yet

<sup>1</sup> In December of 1974, I sent Dent Smith a copy of an account on house palms ("Nine Iron-clad Palms," chapter XII in *House Plants and How to Grow Them* by Parker T. Barnes. Doubleday, Page & Company, 1909). This is a portion of his response to me dated January 16, 1975—W.H.H.



1. *Chamaedorea elegans*, most popular of all palms used inside the home in U.S.A. Many other palms would be striking candidates. Photo by W. H. Hodge.

this seems not to militate soon against its use in the house. Reason indicates that the same thing would apply to an amazingly large number of palms.

By the bye, I had a friend in San Luis Potosi, who kept in his patio an *Archontophoenix cunninghamiana* in a large ceramic jardiniere for 57 years. Five years

ago my friend, Francisco Cabrera, died, but so far as I know the palm still lives on and on and on. It had become stunted when it had about 12 feet of woody trunk, but the crown remained handsome. This plant could very nearly qualify as a house

palm, for the small patio is surrounded on all four sides by a two-story house.

The point, quite briefly, is that numerous palms may be grown indoors if given due care, and nearly all are strikingly ornamental.

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