

Royal Palm Promenades

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Few vistas in the tropics are more majestic than those created by symmetrical files of mature royal palms growing along promenades or avenues. No other genus of ornamental palms lends itself quite so well to such plantings. L. H. Bailey summed up the impact they make when he wrote (*Gentes Herbarum* 3:356. 1935) "Roystoneas are stately noble American trees, for height and airiness and attractive proportions probably not equalled in the palms. The clean stone-gray boles are arresting objects by day or by night."

Especially favored as avenue trees are two West Indian species, *Roystonea regia*, the Cuban royal palm, and *Roystonea oleracea*, the royal palm of the Caribbean Islands. The former is mostly planted as formal avenue species in Florida, Cuba and Central America; the latter has been distributed more widely by man and fine plantings are to be seen not only in this hemisphere, but also in the Old World where it is more familiar under the name of cabbage palm. Three outstanding promenades of royals are shown in the accompanying photographs. (Cover, figures 6-7.)

Most celebrated are the two Alamedas de Palmeiras growing in the Botanic Garden at Rio de Janeiro. The one figured is best known. It forms a promenade 700 yards long lined with a total of 128 palms planted 64 to a side.

Measurements taken in 1942 showed the average height of these trees to be 98 feet and the average diameter to be 40 inches at the swollen base. *Roystonea oleracea* is the species planted. Though originally native to the Lesser Antilles,

seed of this species was apparently brought to the Rio Garden around 1810 by way of Portuguese Macao.

Another beautiful avenue of Caribbean royals is to be seen half-way around the world in the famed Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya, Ceylon. This planting, or Cabbage Palm Avenue as it is called at Peradeniya, is made up of much younger trees, set out in 1905. Here the number of palms is about the same, but the individual trees have been planted closer than at Rio.

Although the native royal palm is appreciated as an avenue tree in Cuba, one of the finest plantings of *Roystonea regia* known to the writer is the one figured, located in the Lancetilla Experiment Station of the United Fruit Company near Tela, Honduras.

It is probably no coincidence that the best promenade plantings of mature royal palms are found in the doldrum area of the tropics away from the destructive forces of hurricanes and typhoons. Not that these trees are weak, for as Bailey indicates in the account referred to above, "anchored by a dense mass of cord-like roots . . . they withstand great stress of wind."

Although these two species of superb avenue palms are frequently confused, they are easily separable on the basis of bole or trunk characters. In *Roystonea oleracea*, the trunk is broadest at the base and then tapers gradually upwards like a pillar or column. The trunk of *Roystonea regia*, on the other hand, is broadest near the middle, tapering from that point to form narrower portions be-



6. Promenade planting of *Roystonea regia*, Lancetilla Experiment Station, Tela, Honduras, 1950.
Photograph by W. H. Hodge.



7. Promenade planting of *Roystonea oleracea*, Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya, Ceylon, 1958.
Photograph by W. H. Hodge.

low and above. From the accompanying illustrations one might infer that the trunks of *R. oleracea*, whether in Brazil or in Ceylon, are more prone to growth of epiphytic lichens, to be seen spotting the trunks.

The Caribbee royal is a superior sub-

ject for promenades and avenues if the impressiveness of maximum height is desired, for it grows to be 125-135 feet tall. The Cuban royal usually is a much shorter tree, probably averaging half the height of the Caribbee royal and seldom obtaining heights of as much as 100 feet.

Palms in the Landscape

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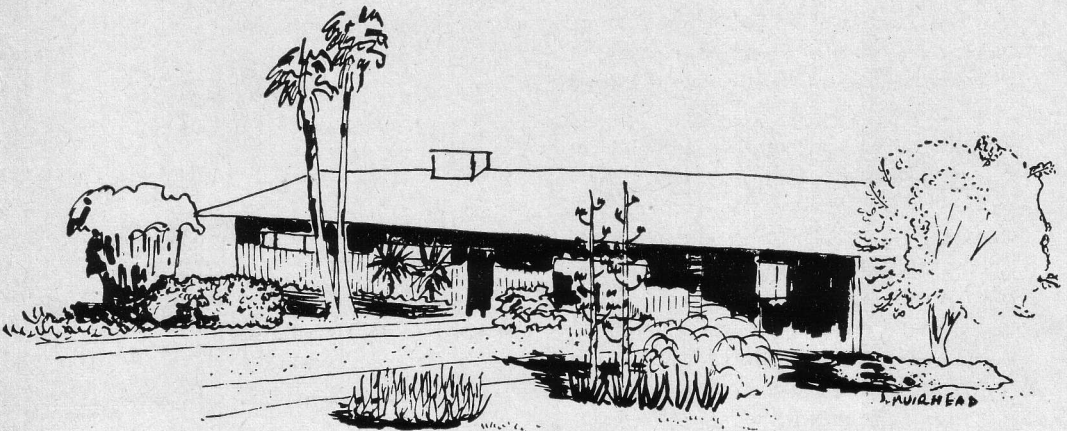
Before the use of palms in the landscape can be properly assessed, it must first be established how palms fit into the art of landscape design. For this we must also know something about style in landscape architecture.

It has often and rightly been pointed out that landscape design is an art and must be approached as an art. What is usually overlooked is that landscape design is the greatest of all arts, the only one with time on its side as a factor in the design process, and an art that denotes the full flowering of a rising culture.

During the Seventeenth Century,

Francis Bacon in his essay "On Gardens" wrote "that when ages come to civility and elegance, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely; as if gardening were the greater perfection." All the present day signs point to a new Golden Age in landscape architecture.

Until about twenty years ago, there were only two styles of landscape design in vogue in America. These were the formal style (figure 20) derived from the axial symmetry of the great French and Italian gardens; and the naturalistic style derived from the easy flowing contours of the English landscape gardens.



8. A pair of palms in the front garden.