

PALM LITERATURE

IMPORTED AND AMERICAN VARIETIES OF DATES IN THE UNITED STATES. Donald R. Hodel and Dennis V. Johnson. University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication 3498. University of California, Oakland. 2007. ISBN 978-1-879906-78-5. Price \$25.00. Softcover. Pp. 112.

Although date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*) are an ancient crop in their area of origin in the Middle East and adjoining areas in North Africa and South Asia, their utilization as a food crop in the New World is relatively recent. Knowledge of the climatic requirements for successful date production, appropriate cultural practices and varieties suitable for production under New World conditions was lacking. In the very late 19th century and the very early 20th century, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) began research aimed at supplying the knowledge necessary for a successful date industry to be established in the US. The USDA established a research station in the low desert area of Southern California in 1904. The US Date Garden (as it was originally called) was moved to Indio, California, in 1907, and until its closure in 1982, the majority of research on dates carried out in the US was performed by Date Station personnel.

The key figure among all date researchers at the Date Station, and indeed among *all* US date researchers, was Roy Wesley Nixon. In a career that began in the 1920s, when dates were a new crop in the United States, and lasted for nearly half a century, Nixon carried out important investigations in all areas of date culture. His research efforts included metaxenia (the effect of pollen from specific males on fruit characteristics), pollination, bunch covering, fertilization, irrigation, fruit thinning and varietal development. The development and economic success of the US date industry was due in no small part to the knowledge that Nixon developed and disseminated to growers.

Nixon was a prolific author of technical publications and industry-oriented popular articles. Among his writings were two book-length works and the manuscript of a third. *Imported Varieties of Dates in the United States* was published by the USDA in 1950. This work described the many varieties of dates that had been imported to the US. Most of these

varieties were no longer extant at the time of writing, as the US industry concentrated on the 'Deglet Noor' and a few other varieties. A companion manuscript, *American Varieties of Dates*, was prepared about 1955 but never published. The reasons for its lack of publication are not known; however, various copies of the draft were in circulation among date researchers and growers.

Nixon's other book, *Growing Dates in the United States*, was first published in 1939 and was updated and revised five additional times through 1978. This book remains the general work most useful to date growers in the US and in other countries. It summarizes Nixon's work as well as that of other researchers in all areas of date production.

These books have long been out of print and difficult to find for most persons. Therefore, the publication by the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources of *Imported and American Varieties of Dates in the United States* is good news, as it will put the valuable information contained in Nixon's works into wider and more accessible circulation. The authors, Donald R. Hodel and Dennis V. Johnson, are knowledgeable workers with dates and other types of palms. Their update contains some valuable new information in addition to the information taken from the earlier works by Nixon.

The book begins with a new section that offers a brief history of the date industry in the US and a snap shot of the industry as it exists today. This is a valuable summary of sometimes difficult to obtain information from various sources. The next section briefly describes the botany of the date palm and the botanical characteristics used to describe, characterize and distinguish date palm varieties.

The next two chapters are revisions and updates of Nixon's book on imported date varieties and his unpublished manuscript on American-derived varieties. In contrast to Nixon's alphabetical organization, the authors divide date varieties into "commercial" and "non-commercial" types. Most of the descriptive work is taken directly from Nixon's work, but the authors have updated it as necessary. In addition, they have added descriptions of a few domestic varieties developed since the mid-1950s. An appendix briefly lists many obscure non-commercial types of imported dates.

Chapter 5 is essentially an updated version of *Growing Dates in the United States*. The authors have retained the original information and advice given in the 1978 edition where appropriate and have updated and expanded specific sections, particularly those dealing with irrigation, fertilization and propagation.

The book concludes with various useful appendices, including a brief biography of Roy Nixon and a list of his works. The book as a whole is nicely produced and attractive. In place of the archival USDA photographs, new color plates (many by noted fruit detective David Karp) vividly illustrate the varieties and cultural practices described.

Imported and American Varieties of Dates in the United States serves as a good, up-to-date, single-volume source of information on all aspects of date growing in the US. Anyone with an interest in date palms will find this book useful. Even those having an earlier copy of *Growing Dates in the United States* will want to acquire a copy for the updated information and color plates. It is highly recommended.

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TROPICAL PLANT & SEED LOCATORS

Adenium obesum - Desert Rose

Bismarckia nobilis - Bismarck Palm

Chambeyronia macrocarpa
Red Feather Palm

Hyophorbe lagenicaulis - Bottle Palm

Ravenea rivularis - Majesty Palm

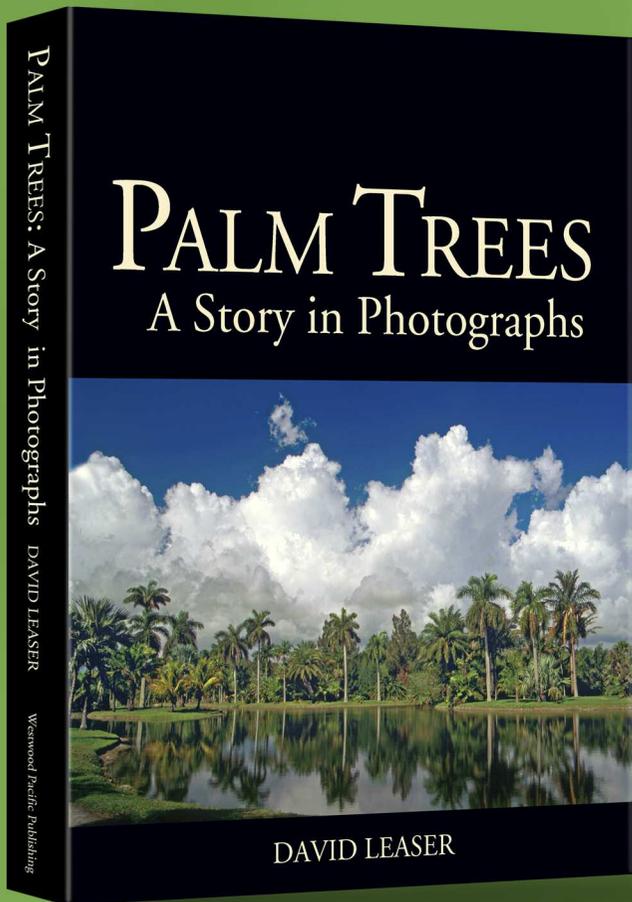
Wodyetia bifurcata - Foxtail Palm

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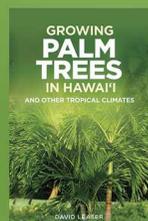
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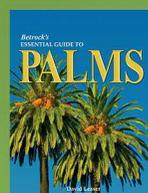
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