

Palm Letters From Georgia

Excerpts from letters written by William D. Manley, between January, 1961, and December, 1963, concerning the joys and difficulties of palm culture in Atlanta. Mr. Manley is an organ builder, chiefly engaged in installing and repairing organs in churches; but his avocation as a palm gardener led him to the discovery of a palm grove which he was able to commercialize, together with his friend, Mr. G. R. Phillips, as a sort of paying hobby. Not since Don Quixote himself has anyone tilted at windmills with more gusto and spirit, the windmills in this case being palms called by that name. Photographs by the author.

1/27/61. After reading the American Horticultural Society special issue on palms and especially the article on cold tolerance of your palms in Daytona Beach I had to sit down and write about my palms here in Atlanta.

I first became interested in palms about 35 years ago, and finally obtained a catalog from Fruitland Nurseries in Augusta, Ga. They listed the windmill palm, *Trachycarpus Fortunei*, and I bought one eighteen inches high. I planted it about four feet from my house, where it did very well throughout the winter. Later on I bought from Glen St. Mary Nurseries a small needle palm, *Rhapidophyllum hystrix*, and set it out near the windmill palm. Both of these palms thrived and withstood any kind of cold experienced here in Atlanta. In November, 1952, we had a freeze down to 2° F. lasting three days and two nights, and these palms withstood it all without losing a leaf.

I had planted several other kinds of palms to test them, but they all "went" sooner or later. Two nice *Butia capitata* prospered for two winters and then were lost in a 9° freeze. Several more windmill palms were planted and all did well.

Three years ago the neighborhood started to deteriorate, so I sold out and built a new home on Peachtree Creek in north Atlanta. The first windmill palm planted at the old place had reached about 35 feet in height, and I was afraid

to make an attempt at moving it. I had two others with six-foot trunks which I did move to the new home and also the needle palm, which by this time weighed about a ton.

After going through the first winter here on the creek I found that I am in a frost pocket. Several *Trachycarpus* in the front yard facing the north have not done so well. Those that are only about three feet high get the full impact of the frost, the taller ones not so much.

There is a beautiful *Chamaerops humilis* here in Atlanta in an old lady's yard. She just calls it a palm and says she got it years ago. It is about ten feet tall, with three trunks, growing well away from the house and unprotected. There are two large *Butia capitata* in Atlanta also, but these are well protected, with shrubbery close about them. One man out in Decatur, a suburb of Atlanta, has gone crazier than we have and has an entire block (he owns a block of rented houses) of *Trachycarpus* lining the curb and the front yards. You can't walk for them.

A swank restaurant opened on Peachtree Road and planted seventeen large palmettoes (*Sabal Palmetto*) with about thirty feet of trunk. It seemed as if they were planted in cement on a high hill facing northwest. Sixteen of them already have been taken out, leaving only one which will probably be done in this winter. I have failed on about five tries



30. *Rapidophyllum hystrix*, the needle palm, at the author's home in Atlanta. Not injured by the record cold weather, minimum 6° below zero Fahr., during January, 1963.

to grow the *Sabal*. I have one now which had its leaves killed, but a new leaf is starting out nice and green, so it should make the grade at least this year.

Just about all the nurseries here stock the *Butia capitata* and don't even know its name. I stopped at one the other day and asked the name of it. The attendant told me it was a coconut palm.

One month ago I really had the surprise of my life. A friend called me and told me he had discovered some low-growing palms 62 miles south of Atlanta down in a swampy area. We went down with a truck and to my amazement there were thousands of beautiful *Sabal minor*. Less than 65 miles from Atlanta, so at first we could not believe our eyes. We each dug up six and brought them back and planted them. I plan to go back

and get at least two dozen for planting in my woods here.

I would list the needle palm, *Rapidophyllum hystrix*, as the hardiest and suppose that *Sabal minor* is in its class. Next is the windmill palm, *Trachycarpus Fortunei*. At least these are the three that are living here in Atlanta and doing well. I have several hundred windmills in pots for giving to friends who want them.

9/25/61. I was astounded last week to find one dozen *Chamaerops humilis* for sale at a nearby nursery. These were \$2.50 in 5-quart cans. I bought five and a friend of mine got the others. This palm should do just about as well as *Trachycarpus*.

Two *Acoelorrhaphe Wrightii* (*Paurotis Wrightii*) are growing in my court

and another close to the house on the southeast side. Also one *Thrinax parviflora* inside and one outside.

10/20/61. Several years ago I discovered in Hawkinsville, Georgia, about 130 miles south of Atlanta, a large grove of *Trachycarpus* in an old estate which was then in litigation. I had a letter a few days ago telling me that the church on the adjoining property had acquired the grove and that the palms would be for sale. I went through there last week for a better look. There was a high growth of weeds, briars and other underbrush. The palms now range in height from about 15 to 30 feet, and about 50 have small trunks.

The other day I went over to see Mr. Ortman, the city horticulturist, and he was surprised to know about palms growing here in Atlanta. Later on I gave him a dozen one-gallon *Trachycarpus Fortunei* which I had grown from seeds. He was completely taken, and promised to set them out in strategic places. Then he took me in the greenhouse and loaded me down with plants for my indoor court.

1/28/62. The *Trachycarpus* grove in Hawkinsville is really big. I counted over 200 palms last week, but couldn't make a complete count because they were too close together. Must be nearly 300 in all. Most are at least 15 feet and many 20 to 25 feet tall.

At my place in Atlanta we had five inches of snow three weeks ago. The temperature fell to 5° and never rose above 18° for three days running. I am in a terrific frost pocket and had my three-foot windmill palms covered, so they came through okay. The big ones showed no sign of damage. The needle palm showed no sign of damage and I am convinced that it is by far the hardest of all palms. Five small *Chamaerops humilis* came through fairly well.

I have lost many sabals (*Sabal Palm-etto*) here. Never have been able to get one to live through our winters. Bob Phillips, who is the only other member of The Palm Society here, has one at his place. It is doing well, but under a canopy of pines so gets no frost and the heat loss is not great at night.

2/25/62. The owners of the big grove of windmill palms at Hawkinsville took me up on my offer to buy them at \$10 apiece. Recently Bob Phillips and I rented a long truck with a lift gate and left here for there at 5 a. m. to bring back some palms. We rounded up a crew of five men and in six hours we had twelve windmills each weighing about 500 pounds loaded and ready to go. We never could have gotten them on the truck without that pneumatic tail gate lift. They were planted the next day. Eight were mine and four were planted at the Phillips home.

I thought I was through with moving palms, but last Monday the owner of my former home where I had left my big windmill palm — 25 years old and 30 feet tall — phoned to say that he was selling the place. There must have been over a hundred fronds on this palm. It had belonged to me and had been part of my life. So I rented a truck and hired nine negroes, dug and loaded the palm in the rain and hauled it six miles at five miles an hour to its new home. It makes the ones I got from Hawkinsville look small.

Finally it came to light how the large grove of *Trachycarpus* came about. It belonged to the old Richardson estate which was bought by the First Methodist Church. The story goes that Mrs. Richardson bought two windmill palms about 75 years ago, and every time she had a baby she would plant about twenty seed. She had eleven children, and has been dead now for about 25 years. Some of

the palms are now up to thirty feet tall and many others have grown from seed dropped twelve or more years ago. Actually, counting the little seedlings, there are thousands.

4/22/62. Now something that will take you right off your seat is that since my last letter, G. R. Phillips and I have bought the entire grove of *Trachycarpus* from the church. We had been buying them at \$10 each as we dug them and brought them to Atlanta for replanting. The chance to buy the whole grove was a challenge we couldn't pass up, for here was the only grove of *Trachycarpus*, I believe, in the United States. And out of one million people in the Atlanta area, only two, Bob Phillips and I, were the only ones with this obsession about palms.

Did I tell you about the alligator my friend Phillips has in his pond? About six years ago a friend gave his son an 8-inch gator. They tossed it in the pond, but thought it would not live through the winters here. Now the gator is about seven feet long and weighs 300 lbs. He gets under a bank in the winter and only comes out in the summer. I guess he feels at home with all the windmill palms lining the bank.

7/3/62. We have placed nine *Trachycarpus Fortunei* in the new and luxurious Americana Motel right in the heart of Atlanta. Seven were large ones and two were small. We had to plant them at night in order not to block traffic. The ones planted in front were at sidewalk level, but the ones planted around the pool had to be lifted with a derrick about 30 feet over the back wall.

This was our first experience at digging them with a large ball. We planted five some time ago at another motel and they sure took a beating. There was no rain for six weeks, a dry wind was blowing all the time and the palms began to

look dead. So we planted new ones free of charge but did not take up the first ones because the central shoot was nice and green. Those at the Americana were dug with a four-foot ball and trucked up here with polyethylene bonnets over the foliage of each palm. We had found that hauling them fast for 130 miles really dried out the leaves. We cut the leaves down to about five and now all these palms look like they had been growing there always. You have to have the right equipment, for these big balls of earth are impossible to lift with brute manpower. Not enough men can get around the ball to lift it.

We also sold two palms to the leading nurseries here, and they in turn have sold three for us. One customer lives just south of Atlanta on a beautiful 600-acre lake, and he wants a dozen.

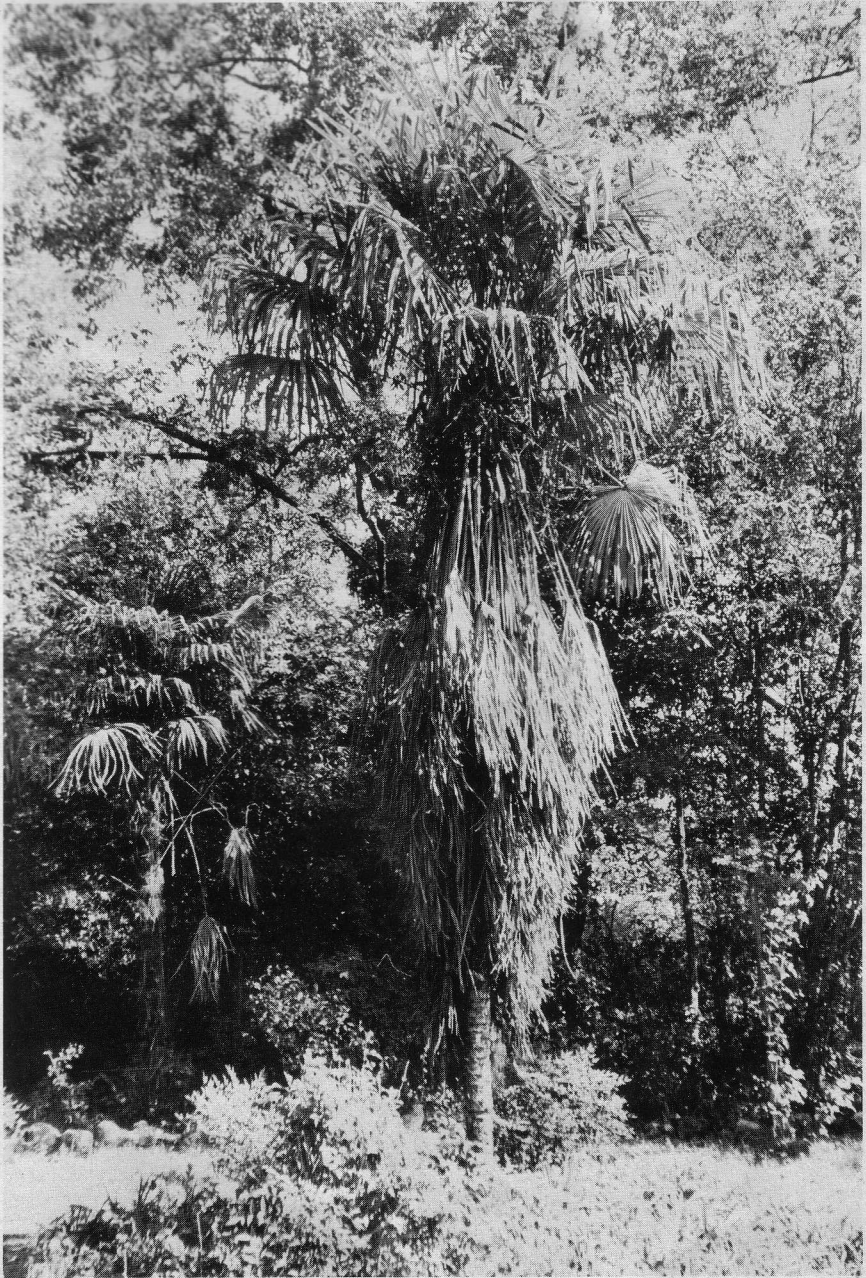
The day before we dig to fill an order, one of us — either Phillips or myself — goes down there to clean up the palms and soak them. It has been extremely dry this year and soaking beforehand seems to help them through the shock of transplanting. No one in that sleepy little town had ever noticed the palms there until we started digging them out, but now everybody wants one or more. I dug a little one with about six inches of trunk and sold it to a doctor for \$18. Then a man across the street wants a large one and three smaller ones, so we will take care of him on the next trip.

8/23/62. Many years ago my father-in-law, knowing I liked palms so much, shipped me from Miami four coconut palms. I put them in the yard and the first time an ice-wagon passed by, that was the end of them. Then and there I found out that just not any palm would grow in Atlanta.

We are now getting \$150 apiece for the windmill palms, planted and guaranteed. If the demand gets better the price



31. Part of a large grove of windmill palms, *Trachycarpus Fortunei*, planted many years ago at Hawkinsville, Georgia.



32. *Trachycarpus Fortunei* standing a little apart from the naturalistic grove pictured on the facing page.

will go up. I have succeeded in getting three nurseries here to stock the windmills, but they soon sold out and I hope will continue to stock them.

11/15/62. The *Trachycarpus* seed here will be ripe soon and I will have possibly a bushel to distribute to palm lovers around the world. Mrs. Wait has given me several names for sending these seed. One is in Japan. Ross Lafler wrote me that his nursery wanted \$20 worth. I will be happy to do this work and have the money go to The Palm Society.

12/19/62. I got back to Atlanta the night of the zero weather. Actually it got down to 4° below zero at my house. It was 6° above zero the night before, and that day it never got higher than

15°. My two butias look as though they have been through a forest fire and I believe they are goners. I have lost others in past years at 10°. My *Trachycarpus* palms are badly burned too.

1/2/63. I have been fooling around with palms for about 35 years and thought I knew everything there was to know. Now I realize that I could write a book about what I don't know. But I'm learning, or at least trying to.

I had always thought that *Butia capitata* was hardier than *Sabal Palmetto*. The day after Christmas I went to Columbia, S. C., to see how the palms had fared over there. Every *Butia* I saw looked dead, but there was no apparent damage to any *Sabal Palmetto*. So — another of my myths exploded.



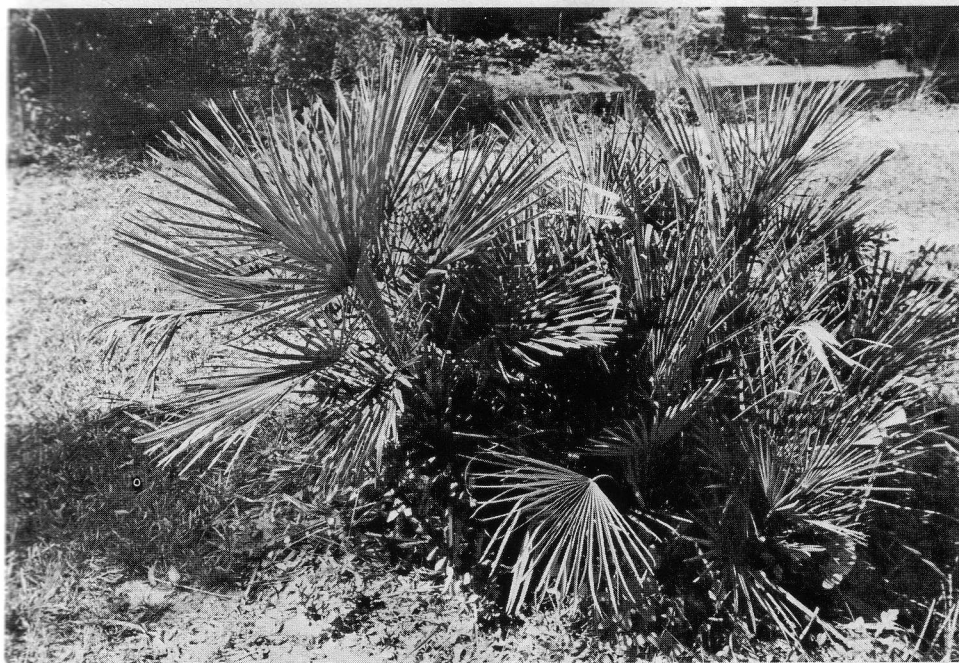
33. Another part of the old grove of *Trachycarpus Fortunei* at Hawkinsville, Ga. Note the young palms growing from dropped seed.

2/24/63. When we had the zero weather here this past December 13th we kidded ourselves in saying it would never happen again. About six weeks later it happened all over again, but worse, sliding down to 3° below zero in Atlanta. Actually it was 6° below at my place. I was in Greenville, S. C., at the time and saw the weather report. I phoned my wife and found she had been up most of the night trying to save the tropical plants in our court. The polyethylene which covers the open side had gotten so cold that it just cracked open like glass. She found some crocus sacks and stuffed them along with blankets into the holes, threw water on the marble floor, heated the court from the house and kept the temperature up to thirty

degrees. The 6° below here at my place showed that the *Sabal minor* did get some burn — not much — but the needle palm still did not show any damage.

4/21/63. I did lose all my *Trachycarpus* except the Old Master — the big one I raised from way back. It is now putting out leaves and spathes. Bob Phillips and I went down last Monday to the grove in Hawkinsville. All the palms were burned somewhat on the leaf tips, but no other damage. I think that being so close to each other saved the day. It got down to 1° below zero there last December. Both large *Chamaerops humilis* were burned badly, but now they are putting out fresh growth.

12/25/63. Christmas and a beautiful day here in Atlanta. Some snow and ice



34. *Chamaerops humilis* at Hawkinsville, Ga., recovering from damage suffered December 13, 1962, when the temperature fell to one degree below zero F.

still around, but the temperature is supposed to rise to 40°.

We have had some near-zeros here the past two weeks. It went down to 6° one night about two weeks ago. I am, however, better prepared this time, and besides I have been here while all this has taken place. None of my palms have shown any damage at all. I did throw a crocus sack over the *Chamaerops* and the *Serenoa*. Of course I had already built a small "sack house" over my prize, the *Paurotis Wrightii* (*Acoelorrhaphe Wrightii*), and with the help of a 100-watt light bulb this plant is green and pretty.

I woke up Monday morning about two o'clock with the rain on the roof,

got up, turned on all the back lights and it was freezing just as it hit. You should have seen all those needle palms I dug last spring, with the weight of the ice bearing the leaves right on down to the ground. The other needle palms, two large ones I have had for many years, stood straight up covered with ice and later on snow, but never bending. The windmill leaves were downed by the sides of the trunk.

Next morning it was a sight to behold. I let air out of my tires and drove over to a hardware store and bought a sled for my grandson. He and his parents live seven miles out, with long hills around, so he really had a time with that sled.

Date Culture in the United States

An abstract consisting of excerpts, some of which are condensed, from Agricultural Information Bulletin No. 207, GROWING DATES in the UNITED STATES, by ROY W. NIXON, Horticulturist at the Date Field Station of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Indio, California. Not all the information contained in the fifty-page bulletin could be summarized below even in condensed form for lack of enough space, and thus the matter reproduced is only a sampling of its contents. It is no longer available from the Government Printing Office. The accompanying illustrations are reproduced by courtesy of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Dates are grown commercially in the desert sections of southern California and Arizona. Fruit production increased from 1 million pounds in 1926 to more than 48 million pounds in 1955. From 1949 to 1953 inclusive, importations of dates, mostly from Iraq, averaged approximately 40 million pounds annually.

In 1957 there were 4,808 acres of dates in California, distributed as follows: 4,850 in Riverside County (Coachella Valley), 151 in Imperial County (Imperial Valley and Yuma Valley, California side), 34 in San Diego County (Borego Valley), 35 in Inyo County (Death Valley), and 8 in San Bernardino County.

In addition there were approximately 350 acres of dates in Arizona. Of these, about 200 acres were in the Salt River Valley near Phoenix and about 65 acres in the Colorado River Valley near Yuma and the rest were scattered mostly in the Gila and upper Colorado River Valleys.

[Updating the above data on acreage: In 1962, the last year for which data have been published by the California Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, there were 4,543 acres of dates in California, 4,311 of which were in Riverside County (Coachella Valley). This represents a decrease of 260 acres from the total reported in 1957. No statistics are available for Arizona. See note in