

but in the southwest U.S.A. it is one of our biggest. All I can say is that I don't even want to think of all the seedlings and palms I have lost over the years because I couldn't give the young plants the rain

water they obviously needed. I also enjoy not having to think about fertilizing the plants at a given time. I simply do it every time; except that I hold back on it during the months of January and February.

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## Palm Growing in Central Florida

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Palms are generally easy to grow in central Florida. Only a few specific guidelines must be considered in their propagation and cultivation. As you may have observed, there are several palms which are hardy here. First of all, don't overlook the natives, as they are excellent for several reasons.

Propagation of palms is generally from seed; however, the clustering types may sometimes be amenable to division. In order to be more assured of germination, the collected seeds must first be cleaned of pulp (fruity tissue) and then dry for a few days if the seed is wet from the pulp. Palm seeds generally are not viable for long periods so it is advisable to plant them within a week or two of collecting. Seeds are readily available if you are willing to look around. They can be found in parks, along streets, in private yards, in the woods, and you can purchase them. Mature seeds are usually available from July until November here in central Florida. If you spot seeds on a palm which interests you and it is on private property, just ask the owner; most people are very generous. Purchasing of palm seeds is another matter, as most seed supply houses specialize in quantity. Of course, as a member of The International Palm Society, you have access to the whole world by way of The Seed Bank.

Once the seed is ready to plant, a well drained soil mix should be obtained. Composition of the mix isn't extremely important as long as it has the following characteristics: must be porous and well drained, should contain at least 60 percent organic material, and be free of pests. Place the soil in a container with good drainage, gently firm the soil (do not pack) so that it is within one inch of the top of the container, scatter the seeds on top and cover with soil to a depth of about one half the seed diameter. Wet the soil thoroughly and allow to drain. Germination of palm seed requires from a few weeks to several months, depending upon the species. The seeds must be kept moist but not soggy until they germinate. When the temperature is kept at 80 to 85° F degrees, they germinate much faster. That does not mean that they will germinate in a few days, but that they will germinate in a few months instead of several. One way to maintain a uniform moisture level is to place the container of soil and seed in a plastic bag and seal it. Keep it in a warm shady place.

After germination of the seed, you may separate the seedlings and transplant them as desired in individual containers. Most landscape type palms should be transplanted singly, whereas, those used for interior purposes are generally planted as multiples to a obtain bushy appearance.

Newly transplanted seedlings should be kept in a shady area until they have become acclimated (at least a month), then moved into direct sun.

Palms are heavy feeders; however, the exact fertilizer analysis is not critical. Some palms, such as the *Phoenix* species, require a substantial amount of manganese and magnesium. Any good garden supply store will carry a special fertilizer with a substantial amount of these elements. Feed your palms several times each year during the growing season, and you will be rewarded with lovely foliage and good growth.

Most palms are easily transplanted. When the specimen is being moved from a container, the roots should be separated so that they are no longer in a tight ball in the shape of a pot. Don't be afraid of breaking a few, there are plenty if the plant is healthy. When repotting or transplanting a palm the general rule of maintaining the same plant depth in the soil applies. If the soil level has left small feeder roots bare, then, a little extra soil on top may be helpful but in most cases the plant should not have any soil added on top of the existing root ball. Transplanting from one

inground location to another should be preceded by a root pruning process. This is accomplished by inserting a shovel vertically about 12 inches into the soil and about 12 inches from the trunk, all around the plant. Wait about 2 weeks, then move the palm to its new home. Here in central Florida, it is always advisable to add peat generously under and around the plant.

As your palm grows the lower leaves may be discarded by the plant. To encourage optimum growth and improve the appearance of the plant, the lower leaves should be trimmed off as they turn yellow.

Indoor palms usually don't require much attention, however, a periodic soap and water cleaning of the foliage and regular fertilization will maintain their health. The most common problem experienced with indoor palms is spider mites which the soap and water treatment will control. Indoor palms will withstand relatively low light conditions for short periods but don't expect them to survive for months under these conditions. Consider rotation of indoor plants into good light (near a window or onto a porch) at weekly intervals to maintain their health.

## Back Cover

*Corypha umbraculifera*, in full flower in a village orchard, Kergalle, Sri Lanka. Photo J. Dransfield. See p. 44.