

hofs, like that which couereth the Floure-de-Luce before it be blowne, which being opened of it felfe, white floures ftart forth, ftanding vpon fhort and flender foot-ftalkes, which are faftened with certaine fmall filaments oir threddy ftrings like vnto little branches: after which fpring out from the fame branches the fruit or Dates, which be in fafhion long and round, in tafte fweet, and many times fomewhat harfh, of a yellowifh red colour; wherein is contained a long hard ftone, which is in ftead of kernell; and feed; the which I haue planted many times in my Garden, and haue growne to the height of three foot: but the firft froft hath nipped them in fuch fort, that foone after they perifhed, notwithstanding my induftrie by couering them, or what elfe I could doe for their fuccour.

The Temperature and Vertues

The Dates which grow in colder regions, when they cannot come to perfect ripenneffe, if they be eaten too plentifully, do fill the body full of raw humors, ingender winde, and oft times caufe the leprofie.

The drier forts of Dates, as *Dioscorides* faith, be good for thofe that fpetbloud, for fuch as haue bad ftomacks, and for thofe alfo that be troubled with the bloody flix.

Dry Dates do ftop the belly, and ftay vomiting, and the wambling of womens ftomackes that are with childe, if they be either eaten in meates or otherwife, or ftamped and applied vnto the ftomacke as a pectorall plaifter.

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Brava for Butia

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Call me fickle if you will, but my "favorite palm" keeps changing with more regularity than does my hairstyle. Quite often the palm in favor will be that one in my collection which is growing the most satisfactorily. Sometimes, however, I abandon my loyalties and go spiritually sashaying after some elusive exotic that I have just read about in *Principes*, pledging to be ever faithful to that species if only I could obtain a nice specimen or two. On a few occasions my weak heart has been swayed by the sight of a gorgeous specimen (perhaps itself swaying) in someone else's garden or in a public conservatory.

But all of these infatuations are short-lived and each time I find myself returning,

with a great deal of guilt, to my one true love, *Butia capitata*.

"Pshaw!" I just heard someone exclaim in disgust. "*Butia capitata* is a common palm. You can find that species anywhere. It isn't special in the least!"

Pshaw indeed. *B. capitata* may be common in that it doesn't bear such a lofty appellation as "King" or "Queen," or even "Princess," but it is far less common in cultivation than I would like to see it. True, this palm is often planted in colder areas on the margin of the subtropics, but as soon as one reaches latitudes in which more exotic species can be grown, *Butia* is restricted to a place on the sidelines, if at all, like yesterday's out-of-date fashions.

This is a shame, because although *Butia* is not special in the sense that it is rare, or for some other reason in vogue, a well-groomed *Butia* is, in my opinion, the most attractive of all palms. Unfortunately, rarely are *Butia* grown and shown to their advantage. Admittedly *Butia* are not stunners when shade-grown or when left untrimmed, or when the trimming has been botched. *Butia* should be grown in full sun. This promotes a stiffer, more compact crown, which actually accentuates, rather than diminishes, the recurving nature of *Butia* leaves, which is their most distinguishing feature. The leaves, as they age and begin to dry, should not be permitted to remain on the tree. What *Butia* lacks in the grace department it more than makes up for in its stiff, formal elegance, and this element is detracted from by dying fronds. Not only should *Butia* be kept free of unsightly fronds, but the pruning should be done with exactitude. The true beauty of *Butia* lies in its geometry, both of leaves and trunk. The leaf bases on the trunk, then, should always be pruned to a uniform length. The resulting marriage of trunk and crown in a well-pruned *Butia* is a veritable work of art and enough to bring tears of admiration to the eyes of all palm-lovers, with the possible exception of the most avid devotees of *Cocos nucifera* and a few renegade *Ravenea* groupies.

Besides its breathtaking beauty, *Butia* offers several other benefits that have helped endear it to me. First, there is the matter of its fruit. It is not for naught that *Butia capitata* has been nicknamed the Jelly Palm. This jelly, made from ripe *Butia* fruit, is tasty indeed and a far more appropriate way for a palmateer to devour a palm product, than to eat preserved palm hearts from a tin.

Butia capitata is also an extraordinarily easy palm to transplant. Even large, mature specimens can be moved with minimal root balls and after a few weeks in their new site, provided their temperature and water requirements are met, will commence growing without a complaint.

Butia is of course legendary in its cold-hardiness. Only *Jubaea chilensis*, a distant cousin, is known to be hardier amongst the pinnate palms. Although *B. capitata* will usually show some cold damage once temperatures hit the low teens, individual specimens have been known to recover from temperatures near 0° F. Should severe cold threaten, the fronds of *B. capitata* can be bundled up and tied for protection quite easily, as it lacks the vicious spines that make tying up a *Phoenix* on a par with wrestling a porcupine.

Lastly, because of its relatively slow growth rate, *B. capitata* need not remain solely within the province of those palmateers lucky enough to live where winters are warm enough to melt a chocolate bar. *Butia capitata* makes an excellent container plant for a sunny spot on the patio. When it has outgrown commercially available pots, construct a large wooden box for it and mount the box on wheels. When the first sharp winds of winter come howling out of the north, or south, depending on which hemisphere you live in, simply wheel your prize specimen into the garage or store it in an enclosed porch. When the palm gets too large for this procedure you can decide then if you want to risk it outside in the ground or donate it to a public conservatory. Whatever you decide, you won't regret having had the *Butia* for all those years, for it will have provided you with more pleasure than a palmateer has a right to expect from any one palm.