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Propagation by Division

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Clustering palms can be propagated by dividing the cluster into two or more pieces. Clustering palms in genera such as *Chamaeodorea*, *Cyrtostachys*, *Ptychosperma*, *Pinanga*, and *Dypsis* can be divided. *Rhapis* species have the clustering growth habit and are a convenient model for discussing propagation by division.

Dividing the *Rhapis* Palm

Division of the *Rhapis* can accomplish two things: it is a way to produce more palms, and it is method used to retain a favorite *Rhapis* in a favorite pot. Eventually, a *Rhapis* will outgrow its container. If you do not want to transplant it into a larger pot, then a simple solution is to remove one or two offshoots and return the main plant to the same container. You will have your original plant plus several new *Rhapis* palms. Division is usually most successful in spring or early summer when the palms are actively growing.

The main stem is the life support system of offshoots (pups) until they grow leaves and roots of their own. Often, an old and tired plant will have lost many roots and is supported by the root systems of its attached pups. If you want to retire the poor old thing, remove all pups and discard the main plant. If the main plant still has a few roots and years left, leave several pups attached to sustain it.

Step-by-step division of *Rhapis excelsa* specimens

Rhapis excelsa may be divided many ways. One may remove a single offshoot (pup), a cluster of offshoots, or separate the palm into several large clumps. The method is the same for all sizes of divisions. I have used a single pup division as an example:

1. Take the palm out of the container. Next, remove all the soil from the roots by loosening it with your hands and using a gentle spray of water. This procedure will expose a sturdy root system and attached offshoots.

For large *Rhapis excelsa* specimens, think big, and have on hand many bags of potting soil, large pots, a roomy work area, and a strong assistant. Large *R. excelsa* specimens can be divided into several clumps or individual canes. The decision can be made after you examine the root system.

2. Choose a pup which has mature leaves and enough roots to fill a 5-inch (13-cm) or larger pot. Use sharp pruning shears to cut the pup as close to the main stem as possible (Fig. 1). Now, using a chopstick and your fingers, very gently untangle and separate the pup's root system from the main mass of roots.

3. Once this slow but necessary deed is done, pot the pup in a container just large enough to accommodate the root system (do not overpot). Often, you must carefully twist the pup downward as you are potting, in order to spiral long roots into the pot. Fortunately, *Rhapis excelsa* roots are very flexible.



1. A small specimen *Rhapis excelsa* with an offshoot ready for division. The dashed line indicates the place where the plant may be divided.

4. Lastly, trim a few older leaves from the division (like pruning branches on a newly transplanted tree). Water thoroughly. Place in a shady spot with protection from wind, sun, and extreme temperatures.

5. A few days later, check your new division. Do not be surprised to see it popped up as if roots have turned into springs. Simply settle the palm back into the pot and firm the soil around the roots.

Care of the New Division

For several months, new divisions should be grown under very low light or deep shade. root stimulator may be lightly applied. Water when the soil is almost dry. If you do not have a greenhouse, leaves should be misted daily in hot or dry weather. Newly potted divisions usually remain inactive for several months and then begin to grow.

A Message from the President and Associate Editor

Several decades have elapsed since a comprehensive monograph on palm horticulture was last published. This Horticulture Issue began over five years ago as an initiative of the Board of Directors of the International Palm Society. The intent was to give palm enthusiasts information on all aspects of palm growing. The Associate Editor took on this special project and began soliciting ideas and manuscripts. Although size limitations restricted us somewhat, we made every attempt to make this a publication that all International Palm Society members will find useful. Information has been solicited to benefit growers in all types of growing environments, and contributions have come from around the world. There are no universally right answers regarding palm horticulture. However, the information presented in this issue is based on years of experience by many successful palm growers.

We hope that you find this publication both useful and enjoyable. You will note an additional emphasis on palm horticulture in all future issues of *Palms*. We are especially pleased to launch the new "Horticulture Column" in this issue. Our intent is for the International Palm Society to provide useful information to everyone from the university scientist to the hobbyist. Our Bylaws state that we operate for "scientific and/or educational purposes related to the study of palms, their propagation, culture, conservation, care and development." We trust that this issue fulfills some of these goals.

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