

Palms for the Home Garden
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August 14, 2002

I happened to be driving on Kings Canyon toward Clovis when I noticed that many of the lovely old and stately Washington Fan Palms (*Washingtonia robusta*) that line the street were being beautifully pruned. The old fronds being removed and they were also being delicately “scaled”, that is, the petiole or stem of the leaf was also being removed smoothly to the trunk. This is a time consuming task but it really makes the palms look more manicured and clean. However, there is some controversy about “scaling” in that most of the literature says that it actually can introduce decay and that it is better to leave the leaf bases and create a lattice look instead.

Observing the pruning on the lovely allee of palms made me think about the number of streets in Fresno that are tree lined with palms, such as Huntington Blvd. Kearney Blvd. and Chateau Fresno and how very few of the new developments are planting them as part of the avenues. I think we should be planting them more often as avenue trees. Many shopping establishments are paying big sums of money to have mature palms installed in the landscapes but few subdivisions are. Palms are relatively fast growing and though they require some maintenance, they rarely cause damage to pavement or foundations. Pruning is required of the old leaves, particularly if you like them to be clean and free of rodents and birds. Many species require very little water once established but will tolerate water unless planted too deeply in heavy soils.

Many species of palms are frost sensitive. These are species to avoid here in the valley unless they can be grown in a protected area. Many palms can be grown in shade and are quite tolerant of it. Some stay quite small and are suited to small patio gardens and as understory plants.

If I were choosing palms for street trees, I would chose based on their ultimate size, their frost hardiness and their tolerance to tough summer conditions. Some species are difficult to find in the nursery trade and one must seek out specialty palm growers. Others are so common that you might not ever consider them because they are so common. After a while, you come to appreciate all palms for their intrinsic and stately beauty. The following list is of species that are well adapted here in the valley and would make nice street trees or vertical elements in the garden. Most will require space because they tend to be the larger species. In terms of placement, remember that in a few years, mostly what one sees up close is the trunk. Don't plant them so close to your home that you can only see the trunk but rather plant them where they can be seen from a distance.

Common Name (Genus and Species)	Height	Special Comments
Washington Fan Palm (<i>Washingtonia robusta</i>)	100 ft.	Fast growing palm for full sun. Tall thin trunks. Drought tolerant
California Fan Palm (<i>Washingtonia filifera</i>)	60 ft.	California native. Robust trunk Drought tolerant
Queen Palm (<i>Syagrus romanzoffiana</i>)	40 ft.	Likes water and fertilizer. Somewhat frost tender here in coldest years.
Mexican Blue Palm (<i>Brahea armata</i>)	40 ft.	Lovely blue foliage, likes full sun, well-drained soil and adequate water. Slow growing.
Guadalupe Palm <i>Brahea Edulis</i>	50 ft.	Full sun, well-drained soil and adequate water. Moderate growth rate. Edible fruit.
Canary Island Date Palm (<i>Phoenix canariensis</i>)	60 ft.	Fast growing but needs space at maturity. Frost and drought tolerant.
Date Palm <i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>	80 ft.	The tree of date fruit. Not as frost tolerant as <i>P. canariensis</i> . Male and female trees. Tends to sucker at base.
Chilean Wine Palm (<i>Jubaea chilensis</i>)	70 ft.	A rare endangered species (in Chile) because of slow growth/ over harvest. Exceptionally lovely tree with massive trunk, excellent for parks and gardens. Edible fruit, Wine is made from plant sap.
Butia Palm, Jelly Palm (<i>Butia capitata</i>)	25 ft.	Attractive hardy feather palm. Best in full sun, well-drained soil and plenty of water.
Chusan Palm or Windmill Palm <i>Trachycarpus fortunei</i>	40 ft.	Very cold hardy, does best in clay soils as long as it is not water-logged.

There are other species that may serve as street trees but their hardiness in very cold winters would be in question. There are also many other species that are more petite in size and would be excellent garden specimens.