



Acoelorrhophe wrightii, Paurotis or Everglades palm



Coccothrinax argentata, silver palm



Leucothrinax morrisii (formerly *Thrinax morrisii*), Key thatch palm



Pseudophoenix sargentii, buccaneer palm, aka cherry palm

Palms in Paradise

A Look at Florida's Native Palms

By Theresa Badurek

When you think of Florida, you may picture palm trees swaying in an orange-blossom scented breeze. Tropical romantic scenes painted by savvy real estate investors lured many a dreamer (and quite a few cold Michiganders) to Florida's shores. But how realistic is that picture when compared to the real Florida? Sometimes it's accurate ... and sometimes a sleepy, Spanish moss-draped swamp is more realistic, but no less romantic. Nevertheless, palms and Florida go together like free orange juice at the

welcome center and tourist pictures with alligators. What most Floridians and visitors alike don't know is that many palms planted here are not native to Florida.

In this article we'll take a tour of the palms that are native to Florida. Many of our native palms can be found from the southeastern United States and into the Caribbean. When you plant our native palms, you help preserve the "real" Florida and protect the sense of place that is unique here in our land of flowers.

Ever the botanical nerd, I will lead

you through the list of 11 Florida-native palms in alphabetical order by botanical name.

PAUROTIS OR EVERGLADES PALM (*Acoelorrhophe wrightii*)

As the name Everglades palm implies, this palm likes moist soils. This is an attractive clustering palm that will reach about 20 feet tall and thrives in Zones 9b-11. The leaves are palmate (fan shaped) and the petiole (stalk) is armed with marginal teeth. Origin: Florida and Caribbean

SILVER PALM (*Coccothrinax argentata*)

If you are looking for a small, solitary palm you've struck gold with the silver palm. It reaches only about 15 feet tall and has palmate leaves with silvery undersides and is an attractive specimen palm. Suited best for Zones 10b-11, this one is recommended for South Florida only. It is also salt tolerant and appropriate for coastal landscapes. Origin: Florida and the Bahamas

KEY THATCH PALM (*Leucothrinax morrisii*, formerly *Thrinax morrisii*)

This is another small palm, reaching only 20 feet tall. A Zone 10b-11 palm, this one does best in South Florida and the Keys (as the name implies). It is also salt tolerant and tolerant of alkaline limestone soils. Often confused with the silver palm, you can recognize this one by the split leaf bases and folded leaves. Origin: Florida Keys and Caribbean

BUCCANEER PALM, AKA CHERRY PALM, (*Pseudophoenix sargentii*)

Yet another South Florida palm, the buccaneer palm survives in Zones 10b-11. Like the others, it is small (about 10 feet tall) and salt tolerant. Bluish green, pinnate (feather-shaped) leaves and a smooth brown (often swollen). Origin: Florida Keys and Caribbean

LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF THERESA BADUREK, UF/IFAS EXTENSION, PINELLAS COUNTY; RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL ORFANDES, UF/IFAS EXTENSION, BROWARD COUNTY.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHAEL ORFANDES, UF/IFAS EXTENSION, BROWARD COUNTY.



Rhapidothymus hystrix, needle palm



Rhapidothymus hystrix, needle palm

NEEDLE PALM (*Rhapidothymus hystrix*)

Needle palm can be grown almost anywhere in Florida (Zones 8-10b). This clustering palm reaches an average height of 6 feet. The center of the cluster is a fibrous brown mass with spiny black "needles" along the trunks. Naturally an understory plant, it is normally found in shade but will adapt to sunnier locations. Leaves are dark green on top and silvery below, which makes it a potential accent plant. Origin: Southeastern United States

ROYAL PALM (*Roystonea regia*)

This palm is an elegant addition to a large landscape, as it grows tall, up to 70 feet. This is a solitary palm with bright green pinnate leaves and a gray ringed trunk with a smooth green crownshaft. The trunk is often swollen at the base and the middle. Found in Zones 10a-11, this palm is drought tolerant and somewhat salt tolerant as well. Origin: South Florida and Cuba (the national tree of Cuba)

SCRUB PALMETTO (*Sabal etonia*)

Scrub palmetto has palmate leaves and is basically trunkless (it's mainly underground). This palm prefers full sun to part shade and likes a well-drained soil. Drought tolerant and hardy in Zones 9-11, it's a winner for most of south-central Florida landscapes. With a height that tops out around 4-6 feet tall, it's a great option for a coarse-textured shrub to lend a tropical feel to your design. Origin: Florida

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THERESA BADUREK, UF/IFAS EXTENSION, PINELLAS COUNTY.



Roystonea regia, royal palm



Sabal etonia, scrub palmetto

Palm care tips:

- Prune only completely dead fronds; better still, leave them on for wildlife habitat. Never remove fronds or petioles (stalks) above the 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions.
- Fertilize – using only with fertilizer formulated specifically for palms – within 50 feet of palms: 8-2-12-4 (8-0-12-4 used where phosphorus is restricted). According to research from the University of Florida/IFAS: "The only way to ensure that you will be getting an effective fertilizer is to specify that 100% of the N, K, Mg, and B sources are slow release and that the Mn, Fe, and other micronutrients are present in sulfate or chelated form." (Publication #ENH1255).

LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF THERESA BADUREK, UF/IFAS EXTENSION, PINELLAS COUNTY; RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF AL L. ROBINSON, UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION.

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs

Where Gardeners Gather
for Inspiration, Knowledge
and Friendship

Join a Garden Club
near you!

Call or visit our website
to find a club in your area

Education • Horticulture
Conservation • Floral Design
Landscape Design • Workshops
Youth Gardening

www.FFGC.org

407-647-7016 • 1400 S. Denning Drive • Winter Park, FL 32789



Sabal minor, dwarf palmetto

DWARF PALMETTO (*Sabal minor*)

Like *S. etonia*, *S. minor* is another single-trunked palm with a trunk that is mainly underground. It can be used in much the same way in a garden design as well, but dwarf palmetto is a great option that can be planted in any Zone in Florida (hardy Zones 7b-11). Origin: Southeastern United States

CABBAGE PALM (*Sabal palmetto*)

The cabbage palm or sabal palm is our state tree (although palms are not really trees) and one of the most common palms in the U.S. It is highly adaptable to many conditions and grows in Zones 8-11, making this an excellent choice anywhere in Florida. Sabal palms grow slowly and top out around 40 feet tall. The fruit are food for wildlife and the old fronds provide habitat for several species, including bats (free pest control anyone?). Origin: Southeastern United States



Sabal palmetto, cabbage palm



Thrinax radiata, Florida thatch palm

TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF THERESA DICKSHEA, UF IRRAS EXTENSION, PINELLAS COUNTY; BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY OF TIMOTHY BRODSCHART, UF IRRAS



SAW PALMETTO (*Serenoa repens*)

The saw palmetto is available in two attractive colors: green and bluish green. These drought- and salt-tolerant, slow-growing palms can be grown statewide, suitable in Zones 8-11. Their trunks sprawl along the ground creating interesting forms in large spaces, usually growing to a maximum height of approximately 6 feet. Origin: Southeastern United States

FLORIDA THATCH PALM (*Thrinax radiata*)

This is another south Florida palm growing

only in Zones 10b-11. Well adapted to alkaline soils, salt and drought tolerant, this plant will reach around 20 feet at maturity. The leaves are palmate and green with yellow ribs. The trunk is slender, gray, and fibrous near the top. Like many native palms (except the royal palm) it is well suited for a small residential landscape. Origin: South Florida and Caribbean .

Bring the “real Florida” back to your neighborhood by planting native palms in your landscape. Local wildlife

(including many pollinators) will appreciate them for food and shelter and your neighbors will think you found a new exotic plant (it will be our little secret)! You may need to ask your local nursery to order these if they are not readily available.

Do you hear that? I think your hammock among the palms is calling. 🌴

Theresa Badurek is the urban horticulture agent for the University of Florida/IFAS Extension in Pinellas County.