



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Rhapis excelsa*¹

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Introduction

The delicate Lady Palm forms dense clumps of bamboo-like stalks topped with very dark green, broad, fan-shaped leaves (Fig. 1). Performing well in northside foundation plantings or other shady locations, slow-growing Lady Palm is also ideal for containers. They lend a rich tropical look to the landscape. Lady Palms can be effective accents in a shrub border or near an entryway. Plant on three to four foot centers to create a mass effect. Locate them in a low-growing ground cover such as Mondo Grass or Lily-Turf for a dramatic effect. This palm looks wonderful when it is lighted from below, or silhouetted at night.

General Information

Scientific name: *Rhapis excelsa*

Pronunciation: RAY-piss eck-SELL-suh

Common name(s): Lady Palm

Family: *Palmae*

Plant type: palm

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: screen; border; mass planting; specimen; container or above-ground planter; naturalizing; accent; suitable for growing indoors

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 1. Lady Palm.

Description

Height: 6 to 12 feet

Spread: 3 to 12 feet

Plant habit: palm

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** lobed
- Leaf shape:** fan-shaped
- Leaf venation:** palmate
- Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- Leaf blade length:** 8 to 12 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** no fall color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

Flower

- Flower color:** yellow
- Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** oval
- Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches
- Fruit cover:** fleshy
- Fruit color:** white

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

- Trunk/bark/branches:** showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
- Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable
- Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

Culture

- Light requirement:** plant grows in the shade
- Soil tolerances:** alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam
- Drought tolerance:** moderate
- Soil salt tolerances:** poor
- Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Lady Palm needs partial to deep shade and fertile organic soil to look its best but will tolerate the poor light, dust, and drought usual of indoor container culture. Be sure that drainage is adequate for indoor use.

Spreading slowly by underground stems, Lady Palm is usually propagated by division. Make more divisions than you need since many canes may not transplant successfully. There are several other species of *Rhapis* for different leaf sizes and shapes.

Pest problems include scale, palm aphids, sooty mold, and caterpillars, although none are usually serious.

Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.