



Caryota spp. Fishtail Palm¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

This clump-growing group of palms has medium green leaf blades which are divided into many segments, each of which resembles the tail of a fancy goldfish (Fig. 1). Rarely exceeding 25 feet in height, a number of species of fishtail palms produce suckers from the base creating a very attractive specimen palm. Its neat habit makes it ideal for use at poolside, in urns or other containers, and it is often seen in well-lit interiorscapes where its distinct form lends a tropical effect. It can be used as a house plant in large homes with plenty of light.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Caryota* spp.

Pronunciation: kair-ee-OH-tuh species

Common name(s): Fishtail Palm

Family: *Arecaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; suitable for growing indoors; near a deck or patio; screen; specimen

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: palm; upright

Crown density: moderate

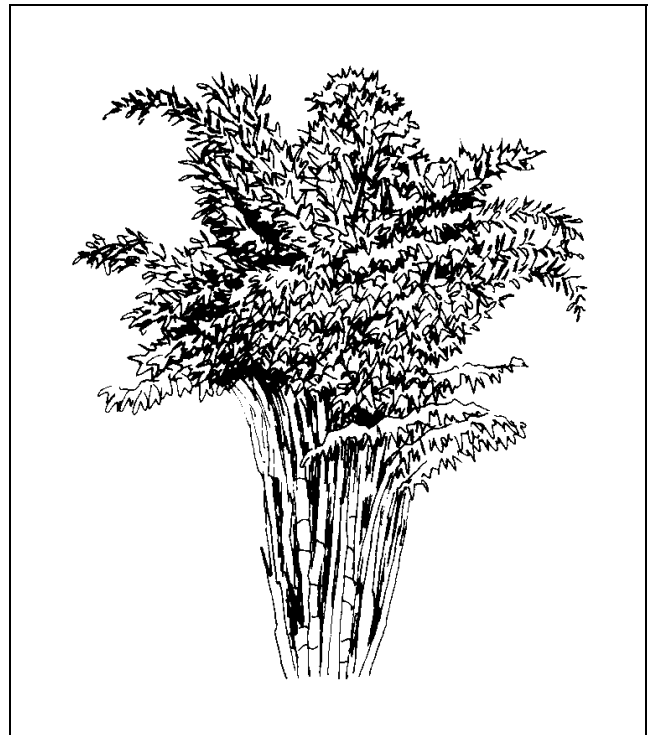


Figure 1. Mature Fishtail Palm.

Growth rate: medium

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: odd pinnately compound

Leaflet margin: incised

Leaflet shape: obovate

Leaflet venation: reticulate

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-124, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaflet blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Crown shaft: no

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

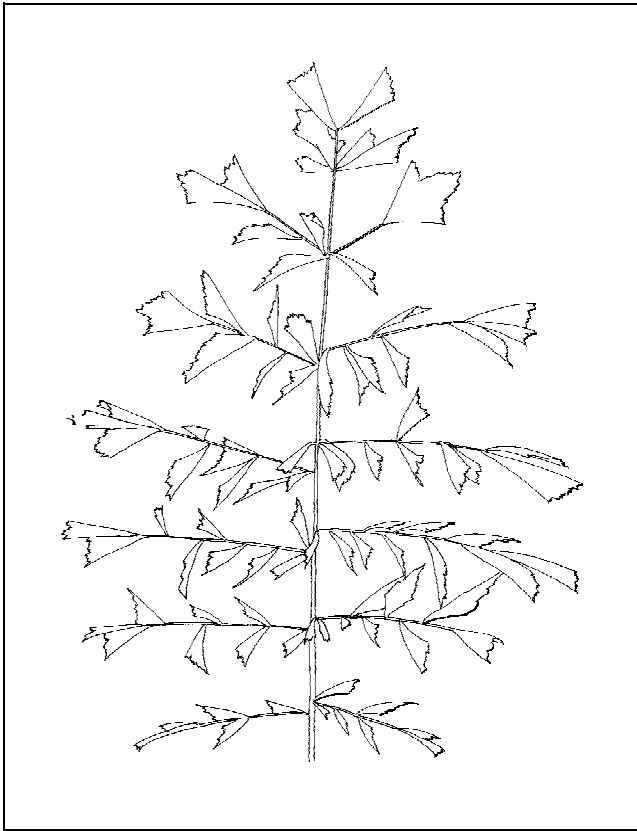


Figure 3. Foliage of Fishtail Palm.

Diseases

Lethal yellowing disease.

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Fishtail Palms can thrive in light conditions from full sun to deep shade, requiring only that its soil be well-drained and reasonably fertile. It has a moderate to rapid growth rate and should be located outdoors in a sheltered location protected from cold.

Unfortunately, the palm is susceptible to lethal yellowing disease. In addition, it is monocarpic so a stem dies after it flowers. This stem must be removed to maintain a neat appearance. There are a variety of other species grown in south Florida nurseries.

Propagation is by seeds or division.

Pests

Red spider mites and scales are serious problems, especially when fishtail palms are used indoors.