



# *Cocos nucifera* Coconut Palm<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The Coconut Palm is one of man's most useful plants (Fig. 1). The heavy crown of long flowing fronds and gently curved trunks lend a tropical effect to any landscape setting in which they can grow. A beautiful street tree, Coconut Palm is also ideal as a background tree, framing tree, or as a striking freestanding specimen. Coconut Palms located along streets, walkways or near patios require pruning to remove the flowers or developing fruit so it doesn't fall and cause injury or property damage.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Cocos nucifera*

**Pronunciation:** KOE-koase noo-SIFF-er-uh

**Common name(s):** Coconut Palm

**Family:** *Areaceae*

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

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** fruit tree; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

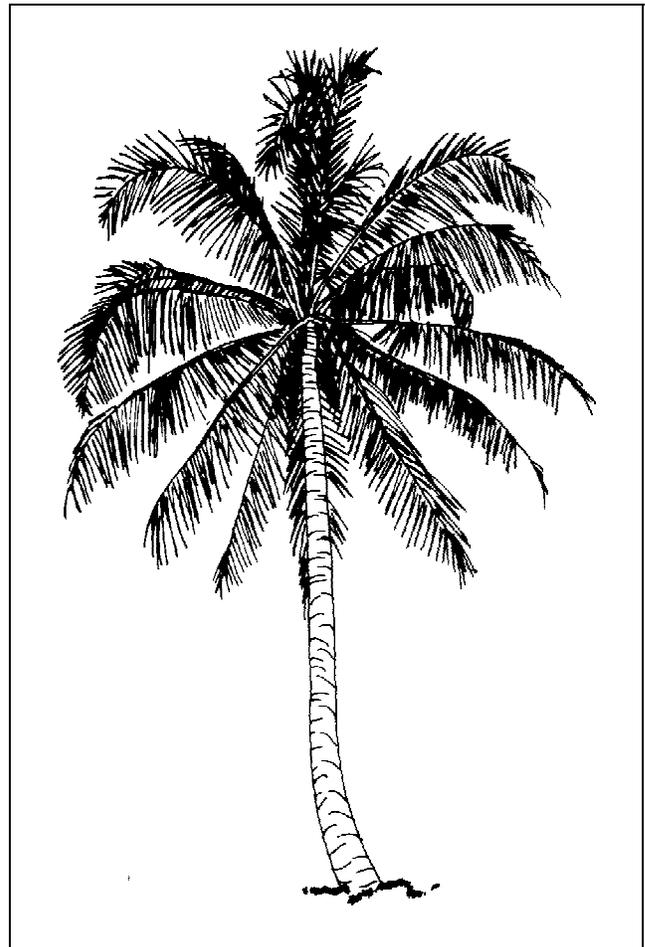


Figure 1. Middle-aged Coconut Palm.

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 50 to 60 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

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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.

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** palm; upright

**Crown density:** open

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** spiral

**Leaf type:** odd pinnately compound

**Leaflet margin:** entire

**Leaflet shape:** linear

**Leaflet venation:** parallel

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaflet blade length:** 18 to 36 inches

**Leaf color:** green; yellow

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval; round (Fig. 3)

**Fruit length:** 6 to 12 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown; green; yellow

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree; showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Crown shaft:** no

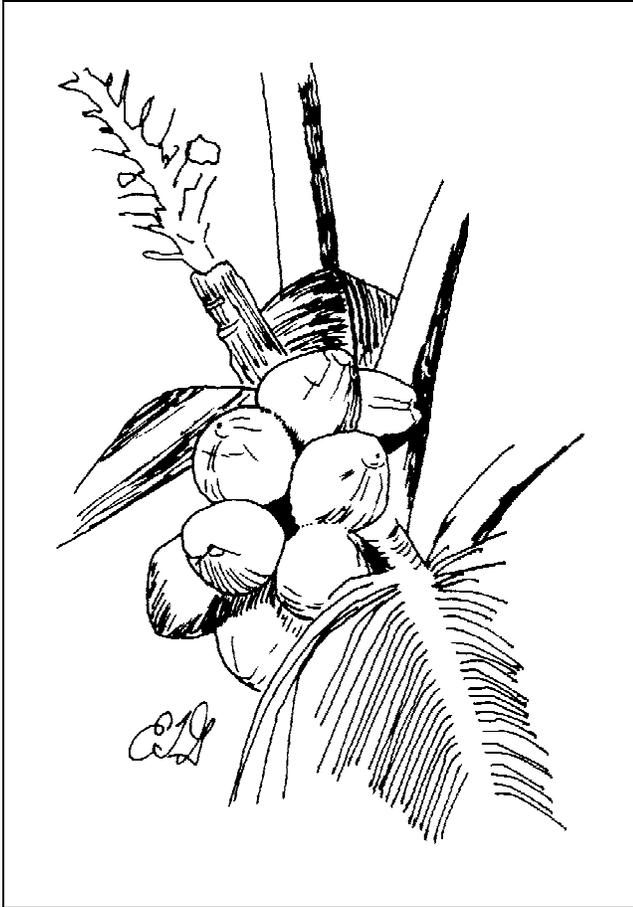


Figure 3. Fruit of Coconut Palm.

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerance:** good

### 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

**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

Due to the widespread devastation of lethal yellowing disease, use the resistant Malayan strains, often called dwarf or pygmy coconuts, and labelled yellow, golden, red, and green, according to the color of their fruits, such as 'Golden Malayan Dwarf'. It is best to purchase trees from a nursery that can assure you that the palms were grown from certified Malayan seed. The Malayan palms are very similar to the Jamaican Tall except for having straight trunks. The red strain is the most rugged of the three but has the least attractive foliage. The variety 'Maypan', a hybrid of Malayan x Panama Tall, has the most robust and rapid growth yet retains its resistance to lethal yellowing disease. All Coconut Palms are highly salt-tolerant and make nice street trees if planted when they are tall enough. Be aware that falling fruit can damage vehicles or hit pedestrians and the flower stalks (in spring) or developing fruit (summer) may need to be removed.

Coconut Palms grow in full sun on any well-drained soils. Plants respond well to being fertilized.

Propagation is by seed. The large coconuts, with outer husk, should be half-buried on their side in soil. Germination can take many months.

### Pests

Nematodes may infest this palm.

### Diseases

Lethal yellowing disease, virus diseases, and fungi all affect Coconut Palms. Be sure to only plant selections which are resistant to lethal yellowing disease. Ganoderma butt rot can infect the lower trunk and roots, and can kill the palm. Avoid injury to the palm in this area. There is no control for butt rot, only prevention.