Sabal minor

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Introduction

The Bluestem Palmetto has a trunk that, in Florida, rarely emerges from the ground and rarely produces side shoots (Fig. 1). Sabal minor is reported to have reached 18-feet-tall in Texas. Height appears to be governed by genetic origin, ranging from 3 to 8-feet-tall in Florida. The dark green, costapalmate leaves vary in size depending on the age of the plant but may reach a length of 5 feet. The fan-shaped leaves of the Bluestem Palmetto are palmately-lobed and segmented with the segments split to 2/3 their length. The leaves of this palm are green to bluish-green in color, and the petioles are unarmed. The inflorescence of this palm exceed the length of the leaves and bear small, white flowers that are strongly fragrant. The summer flowers are followed by small, shiny black fruit.

General Information

Scientific name: Sabal minor
Pronunciation: SAY-bull MY-ner
Common name(s): Dwarf Palmetto, Bluestem Palmetto
Family: Palmae
Plant type: palm
USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 7: year round
Planting month for zone 8: year round
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: native to Florida
Uses: accent; border
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 2 to 7 feet
Spread: 3 to 5 feet
Plant habit: palm; upright
Plant density: open
Growth rate: slow
Texture: coarse

Figure 1. Dwarf Palmetto.
Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: lobed
Leaf shape: star-shaped
Leaf venation: palmate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches
Leaf color: blue or blue-green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; pleasant fragrance

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: black

Fruit characteristic: attracts birds

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk; not particularly showy
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay; occasionally wet
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: moderate
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches
Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Bluestem Palmetto will perform quite well as a specimen in a small garden. Its large leaves and small size make it stand out in the company of other plants. It is also impressive when massed as a tall ground cover. Plant shrubs 4 to 6 feet apart to establish a dense ground cover.

Sabal minor is valued for its hardiness and tropical appearance. It must have a full sun to partial shade position in the landscape. The plant is adaptable to many soil types as long as they are well-drained, and it is drought tolerant. These palms will even grow well on relatively shallow soils.

This palm is readily propagated from seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.