



## *Caryota* spp. Fishtail Palm<sup>1</sup>

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

### 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

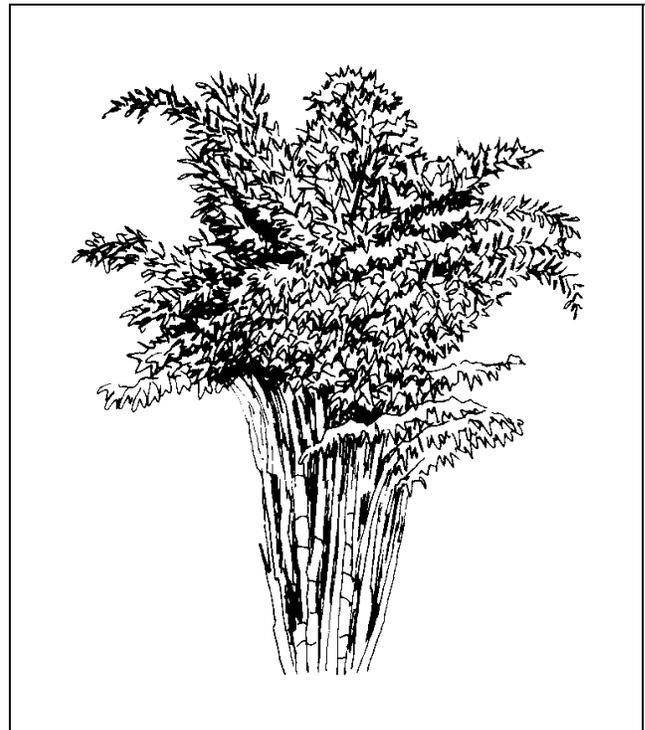


Figure 1. Mature Fishtail Palm.

**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

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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

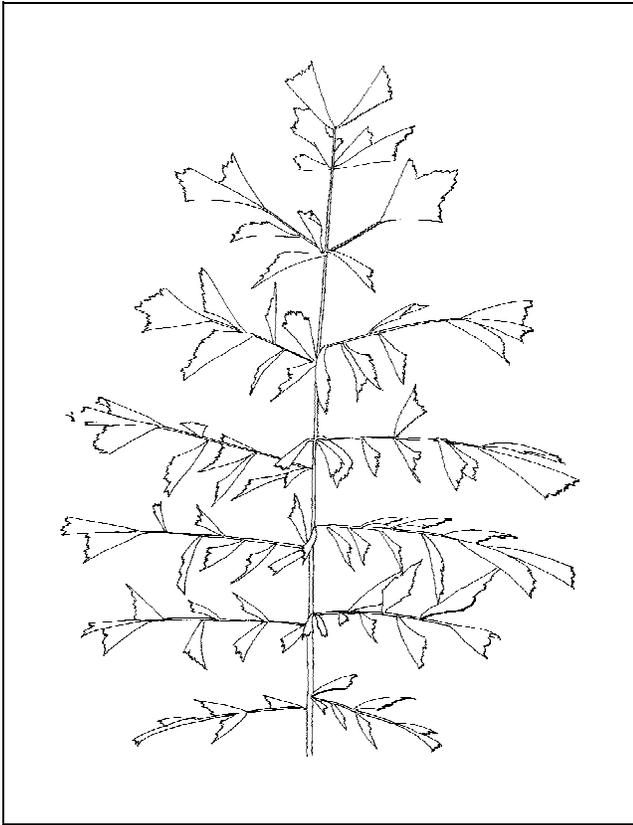
**Trunk/bark/branches:** routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; no thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Crown shaft:** no

### 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.