



Washingtonia filifera Desert Palm¹

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INTRODUCTION

Commonly seen at 40 to 50 feet but capable of soaring to 80 feet in height, Desert Fan Palm is quickly recognized as related to the much-overused, straight, single-trunked street palm of years past, *Washingtonia robusta* (Fig. 1). However, Desert Fan Palm is better suited to the home landscape since it grows more slowly and is shorter. This also allows it to be used in more garden applications, such as containers or grouped together as a mass planting. It does not grow well when it is over-irrigated in Florida because it frequently develops trunk or root rot.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Washingtonia filifera*

Pronunciation: wosh-ing-TOE-nee-uh fill-LIFF-er-uh

Common name(s): Desert Palm, California Washingtonia Palm

Family: *Arecaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more

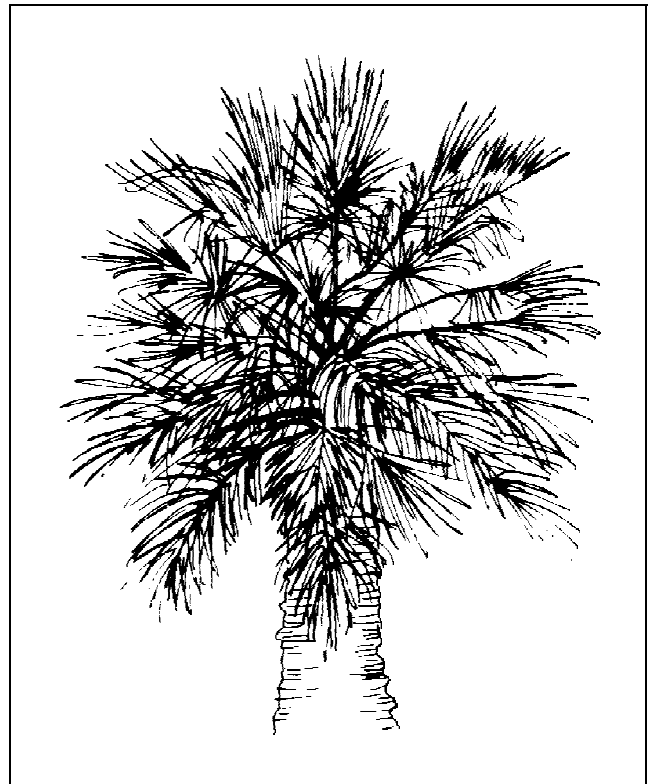


Figure 1. Middle-aged Desert Palm.

or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: palm; upright

Crown density: open

Growth rate: medium

Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate; spiral
Leaf type: costapalmate
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: star-shaped
Leaf venation: palmate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen;
evergreen
Leaf blade length: >36 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

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

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: black

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife;
inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter
problem

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: requires pruning to develop
strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Crown shaft: no

Culture

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

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible

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

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The lower leaves persist on the tree after they die, forming a dense, brown, shaggy covering below the living, grey/green, broad, fan-shaped leaves, giving it the common name of Petticoat Palm. These dead fronds are known to be a fire hazard and a popular bedding roost for rodents and, because of this, must be removed by law in some areas.

Plant this palm only on soil which is extremely well-drained to prevent trunk or root rot. Moderate salt tolerance allows it to be used close to the coast in several of the southern states. This palm could be tried more in well-drained sites as a replacement for *Washingtonia robusta* which grows very tall with a skinny trunk. But over-irrigation and rainy weather could initiate root rot. *Washingtonia filifera* is shorter, has a thicker trunk, and is better suited for planting in dry urban landscapes, such as in Texas, Arizona and California. They reportedly suffer and often die from root rot when irrigated. Select *Washingtonia robusta* in an irrigated landscape and for the eastern U.S.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

Scales while young, palm weevil in old age, palm leaf skeletonizer and a variety of scales at any time can infest this palm.

Diseases

Trunk or root rot in wet soils may infect this tree.