Caryota spp.
Fishtail Palm

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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.
**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  

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**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
**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.

**Diseases**

Lethal yellowing disease.